EVERYBODY'S SAINT FRANCIS

MAURICE F. EGAN

WITH PICTURES BY

M. BOUTET DE MONVEL

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BY

MAURICE FRANCIS EGAN

PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE AT THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA; AUTHOR OF "SONGS AND SONNETS," THE "SEXTON MAGINNIS" STORIES, ETC.

WITH PICTURES BY
M. BOUTET DE MONVEL

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TO MY FRIEND
ROBERT UNDERWOOD JOHNSON
INSPIRER AND CRITIC OF THIS BOOK

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EVERYBODY'S ST. FRANCIS

EVERYBODY'S ST. FRANCIS

I

THE YOUTH OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

THE power of St. Francis of Assisi, son of the practical Peter Bernardone and the tender Madonna Pica, over the Western world of his time, and over our hearts in our time, has been explained in many ways. But it has only one source and that is love. Love made him a poet; love made him a saint; love gave him life and fire and understanding and all the things that were added to him. Let us see if this is not true.

Francis Bernardone, first named John in honor of the first little friend of Our Lord, was not born in a peaceful time. Even distance can lend little enchantment to the view of the panorama of the hating and envious cities, towns, villages, and feudal strongholds

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which we call Italy at the end of the twelfth century. It is possible that Francis was born during the last week of September, in the year 1181.[1] So far as beauty is concerned, there is no question that he was happy in the place of his birth. People who love beauty would go to Umbria, even if Francis — once Bernardone, and afterwards nameless, that he might belong to the whole world — had not become one with Assisi and Umbria. He was not the first poet that Assisi had claimed. There was the elegant Sextus Aurelius Propertius, the equal at least of Lucius Varius Rufus who, according to Browning, in the vestibule of the bath at Rome,

> Read out that long planned, late completed piece,
> His Panegyric on the Emperor.

And later Francis of Assisi imitated the deified Emperor Augustus by assuming the guise and the garb of a mendicant, and in Rome, too, though not with the same purpose. Once a year Augustus begged through fear,

> Asking and taking alms of who may pass,
> And so averting, if submission help,
> Fate's envy, the dread chance and change of things.[2]

[1] The date of his birth is uncertain, some authorities placing it in 1182.
[2] Browning: "Imperante Augusto Natus est."

FRANCIS BERNADONE, AS A CHILD,
WALKING WITH HIS PARENTS

Francis, as we shall see, became a beggar at the door of St. Peter's from a motive more imperial than that of the emperor's.

ITALY DURING THE LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS

ITALY — if we may speak of the atoms striving to fly apart as Italy — was longing for freedom in a dim, half-hearted way. In those days, the rule of the German emperor meant slavery; that of the pope, the hope of freedom, as freedom was then understood. And there was great rejoicing in Assisi in 1198 when the German and Imperial Duke of Spoleto, Conrad of Lützen, was deprived of his place as the feudal lord of Assisi by a decree of the pope.

The joy of the Assisians and the Umbrians would not in the least hinder them from opposing the pope in other temporal matters, if they saw fit. But in this act Pope Innocent III — he who defied the strongest of all forces at Rome, tradition, to bless the beginnings of the work of St. Francis; he who loved symbolism so much that he decreed that the black vestments used in the services for the dead should be lined with green, the color of hope

— was hailed by all lovers of freedom in Umbria as their lover and friend. The Guelfs had triumphed; still, the triumph was precarious. On the heights of the Lateran the pope heard threats of civil war; the strength of the empire was growing in the Two Sicilies, and that young panther, Frederick of Swabia, of the race of the Red-bearded, graceful, alert, and treacherous, was gaining strength in a palace in Palermo for his chance to spring.

It was not a happy time for the birth of a poet greater than Propertius. Never had Assisi been more prosperous, or more besotted in its love for the things of this world. The peasants in Umbria, though somewhat better off than their neighbors, had no time for abstractions. They believed firmly in what they could see. If Our Lord and the gracious Lady, His Mother, had appeared among them, they would have garlanded the front of their houses with green bushes and strewn the flowers of the season before them. The rich would have treated them as the greatest of the earth; the fountains would have run with red and white wine, and Peter Bernardone

would have spared none of his store of money, gained in France and on the road to France, to do honor to the Son of the Almighty God; but no poor man or woman would have been really the better for it all.

"Ah, thou little Lord Jesus," Peter Bernardone would probably have said — "thou art poor; we, the rich of Assisi, will make you rich. Here is a crown of the finest French workmanship and a little sword, made by the infidels of Spain, for thee. But, dear and little Lord, be sure that all the world shall know what the greatest merchant of no mean city of Assisi has given thee."

The powerful merchants in the peninsula believed, with the faith of their eye, that the unseen might at any moment become seen; and in this they differed from our modern men of commerce; but in another way they were like: they were firm in their belief in the value of advertising. They were practical. The thirteenth century was an age of faith; but, nevertheless, avarice, sensualism, coarseness, neglect of the rights of the weak and the poor, the worship of material things, were

prevalent. In mortal hatred of poverty, in love of luxury, the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century were not exceeded by our own time. Faith without morals or good works was not rare in that time, which nourished the germs of our modern progress into fuller life. The pagan superstitions which led Augustus to propitiate the gods by professing to be too mean for their arrows to pierce him (see Browning's "Imperante Augusto Natus est") were a part of life. Brigands, half Christianized, prayed to their patron saints for the coming of a fat-pursed victim; the opulent lord sacked the monastery of his enemy, the opulent abbot, and offered stolen rubies and gold at the shrine of the patron of his family as a propitiation. It was an age of faith, which is the gift of God, and of credulity, which is not.

All kinds of horrible beliefs were welcomed. If the devil appeared frequently, it was probably because he was sure that nobody who did not see him occasionally would believe in him; and honest faith must at times be enforced by miracles, or faith would cease to be. Men

were restless, impetuous, and unreasonable, easily wearied of themselves, and ready at a fiery breath to give up all or to seize all.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE MIDDLE AGES

The ardent preacher could make the most hardened voluptuary, the most heartless free-companion, burst into passionate tears and curses by telling how the Roman gave up the meek Christ to the waiting mob, or a sudden desire for wealth or woman would lead him with equal suddenness to sell his soul to the devil and make hell his portion, though always with the hope that the good St. John or the kindly St. Magdalen would cheat the demon in the end.

That bread and wine, the commonest of food, became in substance the body and blood, soul and divinity, of the risen Christ when the priest repeated the mystic words in commemoration was not doubted by anybody except outlaws and blasphemers. That the accidents of color and form and taste concealed the mystic substance in which humanity and divinity met was a truism of life. For

this belief cathedrals were built, not merely to honor a pure spirit in heaven, unknown and far-off. For this belief monasteries and convents existed, and through it the mass became the center of a vast spiritual and economic system. Later, when it was destroyed, a great part of Germany and nearly all England changed as if by magic. To eradicate it was to eradicate the power of the church. It would have lived had the temporal organization of Christian Rome perished; but Rome, as a spiritual power, cannot exist an hour without it. It was, and is, the very life of the Catholic Church.

In judging the conditions of the time of Francis of Assisi, this truth is often forgotten or ignored by persons who will see the past only through modern eyes. Without the acceptance of the mass as a potent influence, neither Francis nor his century can be comprehended. In the Middle Ages the sacramental teaching about which the celebration of the mass centered, was the expression of the central truths of life. Without knowing what the sacrifice of the mass stood for, it is

as impossible to understand the conditions under which the man of the time of St. Francis of Assisi existed, as to attempt to know the modern currents and cross-currents of life without a knowledge of the meaning and processes of evolution.

It is necessary, too, to comprehend the view of the Italians in the matter of their relations with the popes. In the Middle Ages a quarrel with the holy father about temporalities meant in no sense a revolt against his spiritual teachings, and had nothing to do with those new doctrines frequently arising in Italy in the time of St. Francis, and with which he had no sympathy.

St. Francis broke down some of the most inhuman bulwarks of feudalism, but he was never a politician. He had no rancor against any system of government or social organization. In fact, he did not trouble himself with government or political systems; he thought only of men.

COMMERCE AND GREED

Francis would scarcely have entered into a world more un-Christlike than that surround-

ing him when he lay in his happy mother's arms under the glowing grapes in the arbor near his father's house. And his father, elate with joy at the birth of a son, represented one phase of the burden of society, for Peter Bernardone was the personification of the commercial spirit. To make good bargains, to show the proud nobles that he could buy and sell them if the occasion arose, to treat the poor as wretched outcasts almost as accursed as lepers, to be content in the luxuries he could give his own, not caring much who wept with cold and hunger outside his gates, were conditions of his life. He was one of the many prosperous men of his time — *homme moyen sensuel.* He valued what he could see. He was intensely practical, a model of common sense. It is probable that his other son, Angelo, resembled him; but Francis was like the Provençal, his mother. She knew the songs of the troubadours by heart; when she dreamed, she lived in her own land, and Peter, coming home and finding his little son, changed his name from John to Francis, in honor of her and the far land she loved, where men

FRANCIS KISSING THE HAND OF A LEPER

understood the splendors of life and women's taste rendered the journeys of Italian merchants profitable.

THE MONEY-CHANGERS IN THE TEMPLE

At this time there were bishops in Italy and everywhere else who acted as feudal lords. They had been made feudal lords that they might act as buffers between the king and the nobles, and they accepted the mission. In their opinion their personal rights were the rights of the church. There were some priests who looked on the practice of celibacy as merely a feudal ordinance to save the priest from siding with the nobles. There were convents whose monks had drawn themselves from the contagion of poverty, the essential of one of their vows, and lived the lives of accomplished and learned gentlemen, with the consciousness that they were making a proper compromise between the perfection taught by the founder of their religion and the duties demanded of them by the conditions of their times. There were, too, homes for lepers, for the spirit of sacrifice survived, and the

poor were not entirely neglected; but they and their conditions were becoming more and more despicable in the eyes of all classes.

Of the strange doctrines that grew and flourished in Italy at the time, that of Cathari was wide-spread. It was a mixture of various Oriental opinions. It had a flavor of Zoroaster and a touch of the teachings of Buddha, and it was so pessimistic that marriage, the possession of property, and the care of the body were denounced. Suicide was held to be the best method of relieving the wretched soul from the weight of matter, which is accursed. Manicheism and Gnosticism were revived. Their strange reading of the book of life threatened Christianity and society. In vain Pope Innocent III, occupying the most dangerous and insecure position in Christendom, thundered. Hatred was everywhere; sensuality and avarice were rampant, lean, hungry, and strong. Men were voluptuously in love with the temporal things of life. The beginnings of the progress in the sciences and the arts, which we see in the Middle Ages, were everywhere

evident, but they did not constitute life, and they were as nothing without love.

The little Francis was a spoiled child, for it is easy to spoil a pretty child, and Francis had a charming exterior in childhood and youth. Besides, his mother had nothing to do but spoil him. Peter Bernardone was rich enough to give an easy life to the Madonna Pica, whom he had brought into Umbria from Provence, a transplanted bloom, to add grace to the home of the merchant. And the Madonna Pica lived only for the wondrous son who, she firmly believed, would one day be a great prince. She loved her other son, too; but, then, he was so like her husband's family!

It has always been the fashion for biographers of the saints to supply their heroes with noble ancestors; for was not the Mother of Christ of the house of David? In such manner to the Madonna Pica was given the pedigree of the great French family of Bourlement. At any rate, she had a very noble and romantic point of view of life. The Provençal

ballads were always on her lips. The first poet to sing the Italian speech was nurtured in the language of Provence. He was to be the *preux chevalier*, a great son of God; a merchant, perhaps, like his father, also, but with the poetry of Provence grafted on the shrewd, prudent, prosperous Umbrian stem.

And Madonna Pica, making her little boy Francis a poet and a knight, began the making of the saint who was to give a new world to Italy and to Christendom. He was to fight the antichrist, then unhappily reigning, not with the sword and lance of Pica's beloved paladins, but with weapons so subtle that we of to-day can only wonder at and admire without understanding, his success.

Thomas of Celano, to whom we owe many facts of Francis Bernardone's early life, is never intemperate except in the use of rhetoric. In his heart he knew well that this attractive young stripling, better versed in the tales of the paladins than in the art of reading and writing, was in the eyes of the world not only gay, but good. It was not from the point of view of the world that Thomas of Celano, the

devout follower of the older Francis, judged the younger Francis, but by comparison with his own ideal of ascetic perfection. And it is to be hoped that his denunciations of the baleful carelessness of Italian fathers and mothers which he uttered were made from that high point of view, too.

THE BRINGING UP OF THE BOY

For the good of his mind and the discipline of his body, Francis was sent to the priests of the Church of St. George. It is insinuated that the neighbors pointed out to his proud parents that he needed such discipline. But whatever he learned from the clerics of St. George, he was not long with them. His father wanted him to assist him in his business, for Peter was much away from home, and the father thought that his younger son would make a salesman in the Assisian branch of the business.

It is not hard to understand Bernardone. He was a man of common sense, opulent, ambitious, and of the merchant stock that hoped in time to become barons and princes

by peaceful arts. Francis looked and acted like a young noble. Bernardone was inordinately proud of him. He could afford to give his son anything that the most arrogant lord in Assisi could give his, and the charming Francis, with his romantic and fashionable ideas and ways and his stories of the gay science, of song and farandola, — for his mother had taught him all that was sweet about her delectable country, — was received by the nobles of Assisi not only as a companion, but as a leader. The neighbors were aghast at the extravagance of the son of a merchant, and though the pride of his father was flattered, his parents themselves were not altogether easy about their son, for he was the gayest of the gay. He was at the head of the *corti* of Assisi. They admitted with some trepidation that, when free from his business, he lived like a prince; but, when the keen-eyed and sharp-tongued neighbors put this thought into words, his mother said: "What do you expect? Francis may live as the son of God, and give many children to the Lord." She was always ready to defend her son, or,

rather, to make an apology for him. Had not a strange visitor, as benevolent and as joyous as the holy Simeon, appeared at his birth and predicted that this cheerful and charming son of hers would in time do great work on earth for God?

It was a time for pageants, for symbolical pomp of all kinds. In Umbria the religious instinct was strong, and its teachings were made as objective as possible. It was in Umbria that the banner, "in the dominions of religious painting what the hymn is in poetry," was first used. Great painters touched religious banners with glory for the processions of the feast-days. It is asserted that the "Madonna of San Sisto" was first painted for this purpose. No expense was spared in those days for pageants, sacred or profane. It was in the profane pageants that Francis excelled.

THE LOVE OF PAGEANTRY

The Provençal poets were all the fashion in Italy, and Francis, from his mother, knew them well. When he attired himself as a

jongleur, in a suit one half of ordinary stuff and the other half of silk and velvet, and led the procession of his friends, the effect was pronounced *très chic*, or its equivalent in the argot of the Assisians. Peter Bernardone may have grumbled, but he was secretly pleased. What young noble was the peer of his son in the invention and carrying out of these splendors? Besides, as a shrewd merchant, he recognized that his son helped to set costly fashions; so Francis used all the silk and damask, satin and velvet, he wished for making windows and balconies bright in the days and nights of the parades of the corti.

Folgore da San Geminiano, somewhat later, — about the year 1260, — recites in sonnets the doings of the rich and idle youth of Siena; and from these we may gather the nature of the goings-on of the gay band of Assisi, of which Francis was the leader. In April the members of the club had

> Provençal songs and dances that surpass;
> And quaint French mummings; and through hollow brass
> A sound of German music on the air.[1]

[1] This and the following quotations are from Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Dante and His Circle."

Thomas of Celano and "The Three Companions" who have much to say of Francis, do not mention the German band, but possibly the ascetic Thomas thought of it when he made the extravagance of the early life of Francis appear a thing more evil than it really was.

In July both the gay companions of Assisi and that of Siena had

> . . . barrels of white Tuscan wine
> In ice far down your cellars stored supine;
> And morn and eve to eat in company
> Of those vast jellies dear to you and me;
> Of partridges and youngling pheasants sweet.

Folgore ends his twelve sonnets by taking thought of his best friend:

> Ah! had he but the emperor's wealth, my place
> Were fitted in his love more steadily
> Than is Saint Francis at Assisi.

It is recorded that the members of the company in Siena, celebrated by Folgore in his sonnets of the months, became bankrupt in a single year; but the earlier company of Assisi became bankrupt only when it lost its leader, Francis. This came about through his love of the poor. This question had interrupted

his gaiety many times: "If you learn how to be gracious and munificent in the sight of men, of whom you can expect only a transient kindness, is it not reasonable that you should, — for God, Who gives back all with interest, — strive to be gracious and munificent to His poor?" Once Francis was rude to a poor man who bored him during business hours, for the son of Bernardone was a careful merchant. "If this poor man came in the name of a baron or a count, thou would'st have given him what he asked," Francis said. "But he came in the name of the King of kings! How much better should you have received him!" And after the poor man he went, leaving a crowd of customers to wait until he had made loving amends.

THE DAWNING OF THE SPIRITUAL

Imperial absolutism in the peninsula had received some hard blows. The emperor was no longer admitted as all-powerful, and when the pope seemed inclined to encroach on the liberties of the communes, he was reminded that even a father might not take all liberties

from his children. Perugia stood for feudalism, Assisi for communal freedom. Francis, burning with the ardor of a knight, seeing the vision of Charlemagne and Oliver and Roland before him, threw himself into the fight for Assisi. The Assisians were beaten, and he was taken prisoner and confined in the castle at Perugia. He was not noble by birth, but the imprisoned nobles voted that by his manners he belonged to them, and he was admitted to their company. He was as gay as a lark, and his fellow-prisoners reproached him. Look at the darkness of their lives. What future had they, cut off from the brilliancy of young life in this prison? Francis laughed. "Future? I am content. Don't you know that I shall one day be acclaimed by the whole world? Does not that astonish you more than my good spirits in this jail?"

Was this a jest, or one of those premonitions that flash across the soul of youths and are expressed laughingly? To the pure in heart the dreams of youth often come true. Afterward, this speech of his was well remembered. Francis could put an "antik dis-

position on," and, like Hamlet, say things in jest that had an earnest meaning. In the year 1205 he had not found himself. No crisis had come in his life. He was in love with no woman. The light fire that played through the revels of his companions did not touch him; nor was he the more serious when others of his companions betook themselves to matrimony. But in a dim way Francis already saw his ideal; and as Guido Cavalcanti spoke later, he also had said:

> With other women I beheld my love; —
> Not that the rest were women in mine eyes,
> Who only as her shadows seemed to move.[1]

He grew more and more restless, and he became ill — so ill that he faced death. His convalescence was long. He yearned to be free from the rooms of his father's house, through which he was compelled to walk, aided by a stick. Oh, for the free air again, the fresh waters, the green fields, the old sports, the song of Pierre Vidal in honor of Milan and Italian freedom, and the gay processions of the corti by day and night! When

[1] Dante Gabriel Rossetti's translation.

he was again well, he found that the old zest was gone; for he had stood on the threshold of another world, where there was love, before which all the chaste raptures of chivalry, all the ardors of the troubadours for their hidden ladies, were as nothing. He longed to do something great and fine.

Just as he had gained strength, it became known that the Sicilies were again in revolt against their hated German conquerors. Innocent III was about to be deprived of his guardianship of the young son of the late emperor, Henry VI, to whom he had been consigned by his mother. This meant that the future emperor would be brought up under anti-Italian influences. Now was the time for action. Gautier de Brienne, the popular hero, gathered an army. A noble Assisian volunteered to join him, and Francis, glowing with enthusiasm, offered to be his squire. Bernardone fitted him out splendidly, and he started off, dazzling in his equipage and bearing a shield gallantly. Assisi expected him to be brave, — he had been born brave, — and no less brave in outward show. He enjoyed

his magnificence; nothing for the moment was dearer to his heart. But there came his way a poor noble wretchedly dressed and shivering with cold. Off went the trappings of Francis, and they stood together, Francis as a brown nightingale beside a brilliant peacock. That night at Spoleto he heard a voice which seemed divine, asking him what was his aim in life.

"Earthly honor," Francis answered.

"And which of the two can serve you more," the divine voice further asked, "the master or the servant? And why," it continued, "will you forsake the master for the servant, the lord for the slave?"

"O Lord, what shall I do?" cried Francis.

"Return to the city, and there it shall be told you what you should do, and how you may interpret this vision."

THE HERALD OF CHRIST

Francis obeyed the voice; he left the army of Brienne and went back to Assisi, heedless that his friends and neighbors might call him a coward. But they did not; the youth hailed his return with joy, and again Francis became

a leader of the corti, more extravagant than ever. But he was not the Francis of old. He walked about as if in a dream. Now, Francis was essentially a busy man; so his companions laughed at him, and said he was in love. "I am indeed thinking of a bride," he said, "more noble, more rich, and more beautiful than the world has ever seen."

Cervantes laughed the bedizened specter of Spanish chivalry out of existence, while he recognized the gentleness and innocence of his hero, Don Quixote. Francis Bernardone, seeing how inadequate and how worldly the old chivalry had become, looked for the sacred heart within it. He would be the knight of this heart of the old order. What knight was there in all Christendom who would embrace the leper as his brother? What hater of the Saracen, what cross-bearer in all the Italian peninsula, would kiss the ulcers of the sick pauper and call him friend? Who among the nobles at the tournament or in the ranks of the Count of Brienne, on their way to wrest the Sicilies from the aliens, who among all these abhorrers of strange doctrines, would imitate

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Christ himself and become poor? There were many who would fight in Christ's name for titles and renown, but few who would serve the poor as one of the poor.

Each knight had a lady with whom he was enraptured, to whom he vowed all. His should be the Lady Poverty, the daily companion of Christ on earth and his faithful one on Calvary; "for she is the very base and protector of all the virtues, and first among the evangelical counsels." To be united with God was his one desire, through prayer and through the espousal with the lady of his thoughts. Because he was a poet he was a mystic. Between God and nature there was in his view no conflict. Then he must be an ascetic — that is, a trained athlete in God's service — he knew.

Asceticism in the Middle Ages did not imply that nature was evil or the legitimate pleasures of the world evil, but only that the non-ascetic might not become "fat and scant of breath" when devotion to things higher than nature might be needed.

"For whom is all this bread?" asked Ma-

M. Boutet de Monvel

donna Pica of the servants when the table was overloaded.

"For the poor. Are they not our own? Shall we not give all to God?" Francis answered for them.

And Madonna Pica smiled through her tears.

There were many shabby churches in Umbria. To them Francis sent gifts of linen, of vessels for the mass, that his Master might be duly honored, and that the poor might have for God what they could not afford to offer.

HE BECOMES POOR IN SPIRIT

Francis was moved to go to Rome, — to which city in those days, literally, all roads led. St. Peter's was not then the magnificent thing Michelangelo made it, and the visitor was pained that the offerings of the pilgrims were so few and the temple was so unworthy of the great apostle. He gave all he had at the moment, and for a day became one of the many beggars in the piazza, thus imitating unconsciously the great Augustus. He knew at last what it was to be so poor that he must

beg. This was his first victory over his love of sensuous delights and soft garments, of lucent sweetmeats and spiced wine. Lepers he had always detested, but they were common enough where the poor were crowded together. He shivered at the approach of one of these poor wretches; all the forces of a delicate and fastidious temperament rebelled at the sight of them. And as to the touch of them, he paled at the thought. But on one momentous day he met a frightfully distorted leper as he rode. His thoughts had been on solemn things, — on sacrifice and the love of God, — but at this sight he turned his horse's head to avoid the hideous and miserable creature. Then he dismounted, and reverently and lovingly kissed the ulcers and the decaying features of his brother in Christ. He gave the amazed man all the money he had, and he felt that a new light was shining upon him. After this, the splendid young cavalier haunted the hospitals of the lepers, appearing to them like a living St. George, shining with glory. What he most hated he had embraced for the love of Christ. He felt that the wonderful

change had begun which was to make him, from a being made in the likeness of God, one with God Himself.

He began to see what the vision of Spoleto meant. During his father's absence he gave away everything that he could give to the poor, and his gentle mother did not find fault with him. The lovely views about Assisi, which he had passionately loved, no longer depressed him with mute questionings, as they had done just after his sickness. Cheerful and peaceful, he could wander in the fields again. After one of those walks he knelt one day in the old chapel of St. Damian and asked God to direct him. The voice answered him, as he knelt at the foot of the crucifix, "Francis, go and rebuild my house, which is falling into ruin."

Francis took the message literally. He did not see that it had even a greater meaning. The great house of God was threatened on all sides by the lust of power and wealth which had crept into the very sanctuaries. The crucified Christ had called Francis to build up the very walls of the universal church.

He took some very precious stuffs and sold

them, with his horse, in Foligno. Peter Bernardone was away at the time. But what did that matter to Francis? Had not his father always given him what he had asked for, even when he was most extravagant? And why should the good Peter, who could never refuse his French velvets and his Italian tissues to decorate a balcony during the carnival processions of the corti, find fault when such stuffs were used for a poor church?

But he did, nevertheless. Peter had not heard the voice. He could see the revels of the corti, but he could not see his son's heart. Our Francis was like a child; he had heard the voice of God; his way was clear; he threw down all the money he had before the good priest of St. Damian for the restoration of the ruined church. It was well for the priest of St. Damian that, fearing Peter's anger, he refused the money. Francis then flung it into a window of the church. It was useless to him; and the priest, moved by his piety and sincerity, took him into his house. Peter descended upon St. Damian in search of the money, at the same time vowing vengeance on

his son, who had hidden himself. Peter still believed that Francis had kept some of it; for how could any man of his son's wit have sold at Foligno such rich stuffs at so small a price? Francis praised God and prayed for a month at St. Damian, and then returned to Assisi.

God gave Francis great comfort in those days. He found peace; he gave his will to God, and longed above all things to partake of the sufferings of his Lord. But how unlike the gay leader of the corti he was now! Pale and worn, no longer at point-device in his dress, with unshorn hair and beard, the flower of Assisi was greeted as a madman in his native town. The son of the opulent merchant, the most brilliant of the golden youth, had given up all to be poor. This went beyond the understanding of all Assisi. Assisi said that the once-applauded Francis was a madman. His father, frenzied by the taunts of the townspeople and the disgrace brought upon him by his son, beat him with his own hands and dragged him to his home, where he imprisoned him.

Francis rejoiced at this. Was there not One who had been scourged at the pillar after the dark night in Gethsemane? Francis escaped through the kindness of his mother. Peter, returning from a journey, appealed to the consuls. Francis declared to the Bishop of Assisi that, being devoted to God, he was responsible only to Him. The consuls were glad to turn the case over to the bishop. The bishop advised him to give up everything, so that his father might be appeased.

"My lord," said Francis, "I will give him all that is his, even my very clothes."

He took off all his garments except a hair shirt and laid them at his father's feet. The bishop for the moment threw his own mantle about him. An old gown of a laborer was brought to him. He dipped his hand in mortar and drew a large cross on it.

"Peter Bernardone," he said, "until now I have called you my father; henceforth I can truly say, Our Father, Who art in heaven;

for He is my wealth, and in Him do I place all my hope."

After this renunciation, this literal interpretation of the counsel to leave father and mother for Christ, he went into solitude; he praised the Lord in the woods, singing to his brother the wind and to his sisters the birds, his poems of love of Our Lord in the sweet Provençal speech, which in the beginning of his mission was his preferred tongue.

And while he wandered through the snow, the blasts that bore it from the north howled about the comfortable chamber of Madonna Pica. On her heart fell the hardest blow of this parting, for she loved him more than her other children. Many a time she was to see him in Assisi, clothed in a wretched garment and with naked feet, begging stones from each passer-by, that the church of St. Damian might be repaired. He carried the stones on his back, and repaired the breaches in the walls with his own hands, and all the while he sang and prayed tenderly and ardently, and was always joyful. The people of Assisi could not long look unkindly on him. None except

his implacable father and mocking brother resisted the sunshine of his smile. He finished the work on the church of St. Damian and began to repair that of St. Mary of the Angels, at the Portiuncula, the little place in which he might sleep as the poorest of the poor.

II

THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW LIFE

RANCIS now felt that he was a free man. Poverty to him meant entire liberty to love God and God's creatures. To renew the youth of Christianity was his desire, and by this to give more glory to the risen Christ, who had died in the arms of Lady Poverty. He had no quarrel with riches or with rich men. In his idea of the world, Dives had a place, but Lazarus was the more to be honored because he was poor. Francis was firmly convinced that the poor would always be on the earth, and that contentment and peace could come to every human being only by honoring and loving poverty.

In his day this was a hard saying; but the house of Christ on earth had many mansions. The mansions of the popes and the emperors were not like his little hut at the Portiuncula. He did not expect popes and emperors to live

in little huts or to serve the Lady Poverty in a "beast-colored" gown bound by a girdle of rope, and with a cross of mortar as the only ornament; but for those who wished to imitate the divine life of Christ on earth, who wished to be free to unite themselves entirely with him, the way of the Lady Poverty was the best way. To have a wife and children was good; to love truly and constantly an earthly maiden also led to salvation, and was also good and beautiful and worthy of a knight: but for him who would be united with Love itself who would open the door that shuts out this world from that other of eternal joy and peace, there could be no wife or child or father or mother. All must be forsaken; the supreme surrender must be made with no reservation.

A LOOK AHEAD

In this time of wars, when the Western world was in the making, men ardently desired peace. But peace could not be made on a material basis. The antithesis of Francis of Assisi was to be Frederick of Sicily. Born in 1194, twelve years after Francis, this prince had from

his childhood lived in an atmosphere of strife. An Italian by birth, but representing German imperial domination, he had been the cause of a fierce struggle between his guardian, Innocent III, and the representatives of that domination. Through Constance, his mother, he had inherited kingly rights in the Two Sicilies, and when his uncle, Philip of Swabia, died, he was the last of the Hohenstaufens and the Norman princes. He was to be the most luxurious ruler of his epoch, irresponsible to God or man in his luxury; and for this Dante puts him in hell. The scent of orange-blossoms and strange Oriental perfumes surrounded him in his youth. He was half-Eastern, and the ways of the Saracens were dear to him. The ward of Innocent III, he became an opponent of the claims of the papacy worthy of the steel of that masterful pontiff, who deprived the German emperor of the support of the bishops and made them really vassals of his own.

Educated nominally by ecclesiasts, he came to be regarded as a second Julian the Apostate. And yet he was the same man who was willing to give up Agnes of Bohemia to the order of

St. Clare, protesting that, if her spouse were any other than Christ, he would not have permitted it. He kept a harem, after the Eastern manner, and imported Circassian women as he imported animals for his famous menagerie. In order that he might reign supreme, he did his best to break up the feudal power in the Sicilies. If he endowed monasteries, he acted, like most other rulers of his time, in a spirit of worldly policy. The ecclesiastics were clever and learned; in later times Luther proved the force of his training by breaking great breaches in the system which had trained him. In the thirteenth century the astute laymen in power used the disciplined ecclesiastic to consolidate his power, and showered benefits upon him and his community that his knowledge and experience might not be turned to the advantage of all men. Besides, it was a secular dogma of the times that the land-owning clergy must be directed against the powerful land-owning nobility, with its hereditary privileges. Thus it was not through faith entirely that the church became rich and temporally powerful.

This filled Francis with sorrow; for he was wise enough to see that the condition of the times, as this condition affected institutions, could not be changed by him. He was not Pope Innocent III or Frederick the Splendid whose Oriental knowledge and gorgeous pomps Francis learned to hate; he was only a simple man whose business in life was to love his neighbors and all things God had made.

It was, too, a secular dogma of the time that the machinery of life depended on the possession of land and wealth. The emperor or the prince was important in proportion to the extent of his dominions; a duke became formidable as his estates increased. The power of the Holy Roman Empire was frequently threatened by the great nobles, and though the emperors, intent on centralization, might speak of Portugal, Spain, and Denmark as little kingdoms, their power over these countries was not much more than nominal. The emperors of the Saxon house and the Franconians, by enriching the clergy, were especially adept in using them as "buffers" between themselves and pretentious princes or arrogant

nobles. "Let us observe, too," says Blondel, "that it was not only abbots who became counts, but counts who became abbots." The emperors recognized the danger of the principle of heredity among the nobles, and met it by giving all possible wealth and power to celibates. As an example, Frederick determined to be an absolute ruler in the Sicilies; but he had to reckon with his former guardian, Pope Innocent III, who was equally determined that the Sicilies should not be despotically made a dependence of the German Empire.

Law limiting absolutism was progressing in Germany, but in the Sicilies Frederick felt that he could develop law for his own support. In Germany, during the great struggle of Barbarossa for supremacy, many of the German bishops had decided against the pope; but Innocent III had managed to change this, and the German prelates and clergy, made powerful, were more and more attaching themselves to him. When his time came, all this made Frederick turn his attention toward the conquest of Italy. At the time when Francis of Assisi began his real life Italy was a place

of fear. Without the temporal power, it seemed as though the church might be made the slave of the emperors. Before the work of Francis was well begun, the empire was ruled by one who, while he headed a crusade, was at once the most elegant, the most refined, the keenest, and the most corrupt and voluptuous ruler in Europe.

THE MIND OF FRANCIS

To be rich was to be powerful, and the vice-regent of Christ dared not for a moment sheathe the temporal sword without danger to the interests of Christendom. To be a bishop was to be a temporal prince; to be a monk was to live personally poor, if you will, but as a part of a rich organization protected by all the panoply of war. Yet Francis, knowing this, wrote in his rule for the life of those who joined him:

> The Lord commands us in the gospel: Take heed, beware of all malice and avarice, and guard yourself from the solicitudes of this world and the cares of this life. Therefore let none of the brothers, wherever he may be or whithersoever he may go, carry or receive money or coin in any manner, or cause it

to be received either for clothing or for books, or as the price of any labor, or, indeed, for any reason, except on account of manifest necessity of the sick brother. For we ought not to have more use and esteem for money and coin than of stones. And the devil seeks to blind those who desire or value it more than stones. Let us therefore take care lest, after having left all things, we lose the kingdom of God for such a trifle. And if we should chance to find money, let us no more regard it than the dust we tread under our feet, "for it is vanity of vanities, and all is vanity." And if perchance, which God forbid, it should happen that any brother should collect or have money or coin except only because of the aforesaid necessity of the sick, let all the brothers hold him for a false brother, a thief, a robber, and one having a purse, unless he should become truly penitent.

The brothers who later followed him must not accept money as alms. They were forbidden to collect money for anything or to help any one to seek or make money; but they might work at any trade or profession, though not for more than was absolutely necessary to feed and cover them. Here was a message of the simple life with a vengeance! Was it strange that Assisi and its environs looked on the once extravagant Francis as a madman, that his father raved, his disappoint-

ment working like madness in his soul, or that Angelo, Francis's brother in blood, scoffed?

In the meantime, while the brothers were afar off, not yet awakened from their sleep under the star that was to lead them, Cecco, the charming and boyish Cecco, was not without friends. They grew in number until Assisi began to feel a certain pride in so gentle and patient a man. And there was the poor curate of St. Damian's, who, knowing how delicately Francis had lived, how well he loved the luscious jellies, tinct with cinnamon, and the delicious marchpane, in which the cooks of the Middle Ages delighted, and how sweet the taste of the almond and the orange-flower was to his lips, provided dainties for the young brother while he piled higher the stones of the church of the Portiuncula.

HE LONGS FOR PERFECT POVERTY

Francis suddenly awakened to the fact that he was ceasing to be in training as an athlete of the spirit. It came upon him that his kind friend the priest was holding him back in the race for perfection. Out he rushed from the

priest's house. He had learned at Rome what it was to be a beggar for others; now he became a beggar for himself. A mother about to throw the scraps of her children's meal away, a servant with little left of the stew of lamb but the gristle, the boy about to finish his piece of bread and willing to relinquish the crust, were astonished and touched when Francis begged of them. Here indeed was madness in the son of the rich merchant who might have had the flesh of the peacock and all sorts of concoctions of delicate almond paste every day. Did he go to Madonna Pica, and did she say, with San Lorenzo Giustiniani's mother,

> This blessing be with me forever!
> My hope and doubt were hard to sever,
> That altered face, those holy weeds,
> I filled his wallet and kissed his beads,
> And lost his echoing feet forever?

It is probable that he did not go to his mother, knowing that he would not receive what he desired. He came back with the odds and ends generally given by people to beggars. The sight of them made him ill, but he bravely satisfied his hunger with them, and God gave him pleasure in the eating;

for was not there his dear and pure Sister Water, who serves rich and poor, whether in an earthen pot or a Venetian goblet? She, like St. Francis, is the true friend of Lady Poverty.

A PANTHEISM ABOVE THE GOD PAN

Following his interpretation of the meaning of the vision, Francis, having restored St. Damian's and St. Peter's, spent two years in rebuilding the church of St. Mary of the Angels. The idea of forming a new religious order had not taken form in his soul. It was enough that he should obey the voice. He thought of doing no more. He did not dare to aspire to be a priest. Theology he revered, but learning that did not concern itself immediately with the glory of God he detested. One might make poems, but it was better to live them, and one should make only the poems he could live. Besides, in his belief, books were as nothing compared with men and the things of nature. To get nearer to Christ was to get nearer to nature. He loved poetry, but it must be the poetry of the heart,

not of the academies. All things were of God; to misuse a book or to tread on a written sheet was wrong, for in the book or on the sheet might be the name of God or at least the letters that formed His name. In the eyes of Francis, Pan had been blessed by Christ. Paganism — what was natural and good in paganism — was Christian. The worm in the soil was a symbol of the humility of Christ, the lily of his purity, the birds of his goodness and love, the ravening wolf and the avaricious brigand his creatures who were suffering because the Lady Poverty was despised, and they were left by the proud of the earth to starve or to steal. Francis was a pantheist of the highest pantheism.

He aspired to be neither of the order of the Crucified, which had the care of lepers, nor of the learned Benedictines. In speaking he used only the words of the gospel, but not as a priest, nor with the authority of a priest. His simplicity of nature and his purity of heart were evident. Francis had none of the gifts of a great preacher. In stature he was not tall, not imposing, but his expression was joyful

ST. FRANCIS DISTRIBUTING GOLD TO THE POOR OF ASSISI

and sweet; his smile was exquisite, and he had good teeth. His neck was thin, — indeed, his whole person was thin, — his shoulders were square, he was erect, his arms short, his feet small, — a proof of nobility, Madonna Pica had said, — his brown hands had slim fingers, his skin was delicate, and his beard was thin and black. His face was delicately oval, his hair thick, his eyebrows, at the base of a low forehead, were straight, his eyes clear, though their color is indicated only as clear and dark, and his nose was well modeled. His voice was soft; he had none of the organ tones which his brethren who followed St. Dominic were cultivating in order that they might be, par excellence, the preachers of Christendom. "But his words were as fire," says Thomas of Celano, and he preached peace, only peace, through the way, narrow and yet joyful, of his Lord.

There is no authentically recorded word or act of St. Francis of Assisi which cannot be expressed in the terms of the New Testament, so near did he come to the sacred example of Christ as written in the gospels. It was not

until the twenty-fourth of February, 1209, in the poor little chapel of St. Mary at the Portiuncula, that he knew the full meaning of his mission. On that morning he assisted, probably alone with the priest, at the celebration of the mass. At the gospel of the day he was struck by the words, "Have neither gold nor silver nor money in your purse, nor wherewith to carry aught; neither two habits nor shoes nor a stick."

THE LIGHT STRENGTHENS

Up to this time he had been poor, but not so utterly poor as the apostles were recommended to be. He had worn shoes and he had carried a bag and a stick. Now he cast them away, and finally assumed the peasant's gown, with a cord to bind it about the waist. The gospel for the feast of St. Mathias is not the same today. It was taken from St. Matthew; there were words in it that equally tell part of the message Francis drank in with all his heart: "Take up my yoke upon you, and learn of me because I am meek, and humble of heart; and you shall find rest to your souls. For my

yoke is sweet, and my burden light." But the words that struck Francis to the heart were these words: "Take neither gold nor silver nor money in your purse, nor two habits, nor a staff."

"When were these words said?" he asked the priest.

"When our Lord bade his apostles go forth," was the reply.

He understood at last. Not only for the rebuilding of churches of brick and mortar did he exist, but for the building up of souls with the word of Christ. His precursor, an unknown man, had run through the streets of Assisi, calling out, "Well-being and peace," and had then disappeared. The real herald of the Prince of Peace had now come. He spoke in simple words, to all who would listen, of sorrow for offenses against that perfection which is God, of penance, and of the amendment of life. Here were the roads to peace. "The peace of the Lord be always with you," he said.

It seems that a lad — "puer," the chronicle says — came first to him, and adoringly fol-

lowed him wherever he went; but this boy is touched for a moment by light, and then disappears. The first follower of Francis was Bernard of Quintavalle. In that naïve and loving collection of traditions that gathered about Francis,[1] "which, like the most beautiful things in nature, the flower and the butterfly, should be touched only by delicate hands," [2] one finds the story of how Bernard, "the noblest and richest and wisest in Assisi," was brought to be the disciple of Francis in the hard and narrow way. Francis was wont to say that Bernard had founded the order of the Friars Minor, for he had offered himself naked to the arms of the Crucified.

During the two years Francis had spent in Assisi as "a fool for Christ's sake," Bernard had more and more wondered at his constancy, his patience, his exact observance of what to many seemed impossible — the counsel of Christian perfection. He had known Francis the boy and the youth. Being a serious man, he marveled at the change in him, and at first it struck him that this half-poet, half-*chevalier*

[1] "Fioretti di San Francesco d' Assisi." [2] Sabatier.

errant, might be capable of anything. Time wore on. Bernard, oppressed, as all good men were in a world where simony was almost the rule and high feudal lords and barons, both ecclesiastical and secular, were playing the part of Judas for power and riches, looked for the light that seemed to lead this young fool to acts of love and self-sacrifice.

THE FIRST BROTHER

Dependent entirely on alms, Francis with great simplicity accepted the invitation of Bernard to sup and lodge in his house. Bernard wanted to pluck out the heart of the mystery of the sanctity of this strange young man, for it seemed to him that only the grace of God could have worked this miracle. Bernard went to bed first. Afterward Francis threw himself on his bed in the same room, and pretended to sleep; but Bernard, through the curtains of his bed, watched him by the light of the little lamp of oil. He heard him "snoring loudly, in fashion as though he slept right soundly." Thinking Bernard to be really asleep, Francis rose and said fervently in a

ST. ALBERT'S COLLEGE LIBRARY

low tone, "My God! my God!" and only that. And so he remained until the morning, still repeating the sacred words. Rising at dawn, Bernard said:

"Brother Francis, I am resolved to depart from the ways of the world, and to follow thee as my leader."

The heart of Francis rose in great joy.

"Bernard," he said, "the doing of what you propose is such a wonderful work that we must ask our Lord Jesus Christ what he will have us do; for his will must be ours. Let us go, then, to the bishop's house, where a good priest is; let us hear mass, and then pray until terce, asking God that by our three times opening the missal He will show us the way which it pleases Him we ought to take."

THE SCRIPTURAL TESTS

Bernard assented, doubtless in surprise. They were joined by a third, Peter dei Cattani, a lawyer. It seemed no doubt strange that a man who had spent the night in the contemplation of God should not know the will of the Master; but Francis never took more

than one step at a time. The second was made only when God gave the sign.

At terce, the priest in the bishop's house made the sign of the cross and opened the missal three times. How should Francis and Bernard discover the path of perfection? He read, "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give it to the poor and follow me," for the first time, in the words from St. Matthew. For the second time, in the words from St. Luke, he read, "Take nothing for your journey, neither staff, nor scrip, nor bread, nor money." And for the third time, in those from St. Mark, "If any man will follow me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross."

"Thou hast heard the counsel of Christ; let us fulfil those sacred words," said Francis; "and blessed be our Lord Jesus who has vouchsafed to show forth his life in the holy gospel!"

Bernard was not an enthusiast. He does not seem to have struck anybody as queer. He was not quick to act; but when he acted, he acted thoroughly. He and Peter dei Cattani sold all they had, and, with the help of the cheerful Francis, who, it must be said, had

always been delighted to get rid of money, distributed it among the poor. Francis enjoyed this process immensely. Then Sylvester, a priest from whom Francis had bought stones, used in repairing St. Damian's church, hearing that there was hard cash going for nothing, appeared and reminded Francis that he had not paid sufficiently.

Francis was astounded by this avarice. Could such a man be God's servant? "Very well," Francis said, taking handfuls of gold from Bernard's bag and putting them into the bosom of Sylvester's robe. "There, if you want more, there's more here." The bystanders themselves were shocked by the priest's greed, but he went away with the money. Three days and nights he kept it, but Francis prayed for his conversion so ardently that he returned it.

There was much gossip in Assisi at this time. The companions of Francis had impoverished themselves to help the poor! The distribution of coins at the market-place was spoken of by

every fireside and in every field. And hearing this, Agidius, sometimes called Brother Giles, was drawn to Francis, who at this time dwelt in the lepers' hospital with Brother Bernard and Brother Peter, who called themselves simply three poor men of Assisi doing penance. Giles was a robust man who liked obedience better than prayer. Searching for Francis in the cool of the morning, he came to a cross-road. Whither should he turn? The only course in his extremity was to ask God for a sign. His prayer was answered; he took the road to the poor hut where Francis then dwelt. Francis himself was coming out. Falling on his knees, Giles begged that he might be admitted as one of the companions.

"Dearest brother," said Francis, "God has given a great thing to thee. If the emperor should come to Assisi in order to choose one of its citizens as his knight or his chamberlain, how great would be the number who would wish to be his? Thou, whom the Lord has selected to be of His court, hast infinitely more reason to be glad."

They ate together joyously. Giles was well

dressed, and Francis would have no time lost in changing his fine clothes for the brown robe of the "poor men" of Assisi. Forward they went to the town to find cloth for Brother Giles's habit. On their way they met an old woman in wretched rags, begging.

"For the love of the Lord, dear brother," said Francis, "give thy fine cloak to our poor sister."

Giles gladly obeyed, and his cheerfulness in obeying brought him instant peace and new pleasure. And thus Brother Giles became "his knight of the round table," as Francis liked to call this honest soldier. His reception probably took place in April, 1209. No record of Brother Giles's life previous to his conversion has been found, probably, a devout Franciscan writes, because the purely historical features of a saint's life were of little or no interest to the thirteenth-century biographer, and, as the lives of saints were intended to be read in refectories during meals, there was a comparative disregard of all that did not tend to edification.[1]

[1] "The Golden Sayings of the Blessed Brother Giles of Assisi," Father Paschal Robinson.

The four brothers set forth to let the light of the love of God shine before men. Francis sang cheerfully in the Provençal tongue, which he had learned at his mother's knee. Never was there so gay a band of penitents. Mockery, or the hot sun, or praise, or the sound of thunder, could not make them less joyous. In giving up all, they had gained all. Francis had none of the graces or affections of the official orator of the time. He was ardent, direct, simple, aiming directly at the heart, and hitting the core of the heart. Giles, who had no eloquence, said when Francis had finished:

"You had better believe what Brother Francis says; his advice is good." Only, when those who had at first treated them as wild men from the woods came and showed them honor, Giles would say, "Our true glory is lost when we receive glory from creatures."

THE ECONOMISTS ARE AROUSED

But their success in moving hearts to the love of God and the amendment of life was marvelous. This was especially so in the province

of the Marches of Ancona, the little birthplace of that Frederick, the antithesis of Francis, who was at this time fifteen years of age. Three others were shortly after this added to their number, Sabbatino, Morico, and Giovanni of the Hat, so called because he would wear a hat instead of the hood affected by his brethren, and of whom unkind things were afterward said.

The brethren continued to increase in numbers. Among them was Angelo Tancredi, another soldier, young and chivalrous, who came, according to the words of Francis, "to exchange sword-belt and sword and spurs for the cord, the cross, and the dust on his feet." "I consecrate thee," he added, "knight of the army of the Lord."

Assisi began to grow tired of these poor men, and the Portiuncula was too small to hold them. They acquired, probably through Brother Morico, the privilege of occupying several little buildings at Rivo Torto, not far from the Portiuncula. These buildings belonged to a religious order of the Crucified. The relatives and acquaintances of Francis said constantly

that his followers had given up their own property in order to prey upon that of others. The old story of his having sold his father's precious stuffs for a song at Foligno was received again with scorn, and there were those who asked how he could hold his promise to keep the lamp perpetually lit before the crucifix in the church of St. Damian when he despised money, for how was oil to be had without money?

In a word, the sympathy which the simplicity of young Francis had gained did not extend to his followers, who were "too old to be carried away by such vagaries"; consequently, the winter in the squalid structures at Rivo Torto was wretched. It is true that, according to the precepts of Francis, the brothers worked whenever they could find work to do, but they were forbidden to take current wages for their work; they must accept only what was absolutely necessary. The outcries of the Assisians against these perverted creatures who disturbed economic conditions and begged voluntarily reached the ears of the Bishop of Assisi, Guido by name.

He remonstrated with Francis. Was not his zeal leading him into an excess of self-denial? How was it possible to live without property?

"If we had property," answered Francis, "we should have to fight in order to defend it. The goods of the world cannot be kept without appeals to the law and without contentions, without violence and war. All this means the ruin of the love of God and our neighbors. For these reasons we shall never willingly possess the things of the earth."

THE WORLD VERSUS POVERTY

The bishop could say nothing to this. He had troubles of his own, caused by the constant effort to retain his temporalities, and his opponents were among the Benedictines and the Crucified. Even at this time, before the Emperor Frederick was old enough to attempt to be absolute in Italy, the various governments had become most oppressive; class was against class, and even bishop against bishop. There was no peace for the church because she was growing in riches. Francis knew this too well, and Bishop Guido himself

knew, too, that the burden of his position was made heavier by the constant vigilance he exercised in defending its temporal appendages. Nevertheless, the bishop had no sympathy with beggars who might, by using some of their worldly goods, cease to be beggars. But, as Jorgensen points out,[1] Francis knew what Leo Tolstoi preached in our time — that the possession of any personal property, however small, is an obstacle to the leading of an absolutely Christlike life. All brothers must work, — that was but following the life of Christ, — but they must work not for gain, but for the necessities of life. "He who will not work ought not to eat, and each must work at the work he can do." Cast out by their own, strangers began to be kind to them at Rivo Torto; yet one who had put a large sum on the altar of the Portiuncula found it later on a pile of refuse in the road. The advice of the bishop had fallen on unreceptive soil.

At Rivo Torto, Francis had written a few words for the guidance of his brethren, based on the counsels of perfection left by Christ.

[1] "St. Francis d' Assisi," Johannes Jorgensen.

But he felt that he needed authoritative support. He had not founded a religious order; and if he had, the approbation of the pope would not have been necessary to him in 1210. Five years later the Council of the Lateran decided otherwise. But he wanted his followers to have the right to preach, which was confined to priests. This right had already been granted to Pierre Vaud, to Durand de Huesca and his Catholic Vaudois, and to other laymen.

The Bishop of Assisi was already at Rome in the summer of 1210. Francis was not sure of his support, but he knew that, as a fellow Assisian, he would not oppose him, the blood of Assisi being thicker than water when alien Italians appeared. Francis was a layman, — even after he had received his tonsure he was not a priest, — and he had none of the privileges or the rights of a priest, nor had Bernard of Quintavalle, who undertook to guide the little band to the tomb of St. Peter, which Francis loved. They sang, prayed, and worked at whatever honorably came to their hands on their way.

BROTHER GILES GIVING HIS CLOTHES
TO A BEGGAR WOMAN

Once at Rome, Guido presented them to Cardinal John of St. Paul, Bishop of Sabina, a member of the princely house of Colonna. The bishop may have thought that this noble person, whose days had been magnificent, might persuade Francis to mitigate the stringency of his spiritual athletic exercise and the hardness of his physical life. The cardinal invited the little band to be his guests. He was most kind; but after having examined Francis and his brethren as to their plans, he told them that they were trying to knock their heads against a solid rock. Francis was willing to do even this, if it pleased God. The cardinal was amazed and touched. "Pray for me," he said, "and hold me as one of your little brothers."

AT ROME

It is said that Francis was troubled by the delay that was usual at the court of Rome, where haste was looked upon as a vice, and that one day he and his poorly clad flock made their way to the palace of the Lateran, and reached the gallery of the Belvedere,

where Innocent III was walking. It was not a propitious time. The people of Rome were turbulent and threatening. Not long since they had driven the pope from his tower of refuge, Torre dei Conti. He looked out now on dissensions everywhere, and dissensions occasioned by avarice and the lust of power. Besides, the Saracens threatened, and a new crusade was ardently desired in order to curb their power, which was not only physical, but insidiously intellectual. The favor Pope Alexander III had shown to the merchant Pierre Vaud in 1179 and his "Poor Men of Lyons" who had preached poverty had been turned against the holy see. Innocent had reason to dread the social disturbances made by demagogues in the name of Christlike poverty. Assisi itself had not long before burned its citadel rather than let it pass into the possession of Innocent. Arnold of Brescia's attack on the possession of property was still vibrating, and at the apparition of these strange, weird figures, the pontiff doubtless believed that there was a new invasion of queer heretics bent on destroying all vested interests.

He had them driven out, and they went humbly.

That night the perplexed pontiff had a dream of a little palm that sprang up at his feet and became a splendid tree. He told this dream to the Cardinal of St. Paul. The poor little palm, somehow or other, brought to his mind the slim figure of Francis. The cardinal answered that he knew that Francis was a veritably perfect man, resolved to follow to the letter the evangelical counsels and to revive the faith of the whole church, which was failing day by day. The pope said that he would like to see this man again, so Innocent III and Francis met. The pope was impressed by the simplicity and earnestness of Francis and by some unknown force that seemed to proceed from him. He feared to approve of the utter, voluntary poverty of the life proposed by this man, yet to disapprove of it would be, as the Cardinal of St. Paul pointed out, to offend against the teachings of Christ: "for if any man say that the observance and the vow of evangelical perfection contains anything irrational or impossible to

be observed, he is convicted of blasphemy against Christ, the author of the gospel."

INNOCENT ACCORDS THE RIGHT TO PREACH IN 1210

THE pope again sent to Francis. And Francis, having prayed for light, spoke to the holy father in a parable in which, according to St. Bonaventure, he told of a great king who had married a beautiful, but lowly and poor, wife. This king nourished the children of this poor woman at the royal table. Could God do less for His children born of poverty? Had not Christ, preaching evangelical poverty, promised an eternal kingdom to his followers? Will he fail, then, to give them what is sufficient for this life? Still the pontiff hesitated. He had seen other failures in his time. Clairvaux itself had not fulfilled the hopes of St. Bernard. This great foundation, according to Bossuet, "*l'image la plus achevée de l'ancienne église*," lost much of its glory in losing its founder.

Innocent III heard Francis, and there flashed across his mind the memory of another vision

ST. FRANCIS RECEIVING PERMISSION TO PREACH
REPENTANCE FROM POPE INNOCENT III

he had had, in which he had seen the trembling edifice of the Lateran supported by a beggar. At last he said: "Go with the blessing of the Lord, and preach repentance to all in your own way; and when the Almighty shall have made you grow in grace and in numbers, return to me joyously for greater favors." Francis thanked the holy father most humbly, and went away singing the praises of God.

The Cardinal of St. Paul gathered the poor men together, and permitted the laymen among them to wear a tonsure smaller than that of priests. There is great reason to believe that Francis was ordained deacon [1] by the Bishop of Assisi. But the pontiff and the curia were very careful; the right to preach granted to these laymen covered only moral questions. They were not sufficiently learned in theology to be permitted to teach on matters of dogma.

After a devout visit to the tombs of the apostles, the brethren started for the valley of Spoleto. They were exaltedly happy. They sang, they talked, and forgot all except the joy of their mission. Should they fix them-

[1] But this did not make him a priest.

selves in the country places or in the cities? This was a question which they did not decide until they halted for rest near the town of Orta. They had suffered much in the summer heat of the Campagna, having once been saved from starvation by a man who, appearing suddenly, gave them bread and went away at once. Having consulted with the brethren, Francis concluded that the cities offered them the greater chances for spreading the love of God.

"The country was made by God and the cities by man," said one of the brethren, bred in the country, "and therefore the country is better for us."

AT THE CROOKED RIVER

"Not so," said Francis; "God made all." And they moved toward Assisi, to the Rivo Torto — the crooked river. There, in the deserted cabins, the space was so small that Francis had to write the names of each brother on the spot he must occupy. Few people came near them. A wooden cross was their only oratory. They had no books, but Francis

told them, looking upon the autumnal beauties of the Umbrian valley, that created things were the best of all books. They must always be in sympathy with nature as well as with poverty.

THE VERY LITTLE BRETHREN

The Emperor Otto of Brunswick passed on his way to be crowned by Innocent; Francis did not go to meet him, but sent one of the brethren, who warned him of the sorrows that would come to him. The news of the victory of Francis at Rome over the prudence of the pope and the doubts of the sacred college had spread. It was known that he had the right to preach. The priests of St. George invited him to their pulpit; so likewise did the Bishop of Assisi. The basilica of his native city could not hold the crowds that came. Nobody had ever spoken like this man. And the first fruits of his work was the peace he made between the ever-warring factions of his city, the patricians and the plebeians, the majors and the minors. By this convention the minors were relieved from serfdom, and war

could not be made or treaties ratified except by the consent of both parties. About this time the priest Sylvester, who had claimed for his dues in the market-place of Assisi, and had been smitten with repentance, joined the little community, its first priest. About this time, too, Francis was struck by the humility of the word "minors." Was it not the name of the poorest class of the people, those he loved best? And was it not held in honor by Christ? Ah, his brothers should be called the very little Brothers of Poverty; and so they were named by him Friars Minor.

Francis had great charity for his little brothers, and they lived in the sweetest harmony at Rivo Torto. "I am ill of hunger," said a friar one night. Now, the fast was a solemn thing to this brother, and he dared not break it. To do so might seem greedy and even sinful; and so, understanding his scruples, Francis invited others to eat with him, so that he might not seem luxurious in eating alone at an unusual time. A sick brother longed for grapes, and Francis ate them with him to quiet his scruples. The friars dwelt at Rivo

Torto until one day a peasant rudely drove an ass into the hut where they were.

"Our mission," said Francis, taking this as a sign, "is not to keep a stable for asses, but to pray and to show men the way of salvation." So back to the Portiuncula they went, and it was in the shadow of the Portiuncula that the mystical rose of the Franciscan movement, incomplete without the feminine influence, was to bloom. Though he did not know it then, Francis went back to find Clara, the young daughter of Favorino de Scifi, who was to become his own little daughter in the love of Christ. This was to take place on March 18, 1212.

III

THE WOLF OF GUBBIO AND THE COMING OF SANTA CLARA

RANCIS was now free to preach; formerly a bishop or a parish priest might object to an unaccredited layman's assuming the prerogatives of the ordained. As the Catholic Church, the central basis of which is authority, refuses the Bible to the unlearned unless it is accompanied by an authoritative interpretation, so a preacher unauthorized by superior authority is suspect. Francis had desired the blessing of Innocent III for his way of life; but even more he had desired the permission he now received.

In 1211 the Benedictines, to whom the chapel of the Portiuncula belonged, gave it to Francis; but he refused to own it, and rented it for a basket of fish, to be sent annually to its owners. On the altar was a picture of the "Assumption of our Lady," and from the

symbols in the picture the chapel was known as that of "Our Lady of the Angels." In the wood near the place, which Francis loved, the brethren built a hut of interwoven branches, thatched with mud and leaves. They slept on straw, and the ground served both for tables and for chairs. There were no inclosures about their cabins except hedges. The cabin, the earliest model of a Franciscan establishment, and that which Francis hoped would always be the model, was called *luogo*. The word "convent," afterward substituted, implied a giving way to the relaxation Francis feared from the influence of prudent prelates and the learned; for it must be admitted that, excepting the people who concerned themselves with making cheerful songs and the pious interpretation of the word of God, Francis had a pathetic horror of the learned. As the colony of the Portiuncula grew, new buildings were made of wood, plastered with mud. The friars must dwell in them as pilgrims and strangers.

The influence of Francis was so great at this time that all received his decisions with

joy, and the wretched cabins in the wood seemed to be the vestibules of paradise. He was looked on as the living symbol of Christ, for, it must be repeated, that abstractions did not appeal to the medieval folk. Here was a man who did what Christ had counseled — not commanded — those who would follow him perfectly to do. His example in the way of perfection was not for everybody. It was enough for these brethren that they had answered the call. Their lamps must shine before all men, because Christ lived in them, but gently, sweetly, as light falls.

In the beginning there were murmurs against this imprudent, unwise, and unworldly way of life. Common sense was against it; but, then, from the point of view of the Roman patrician, the aristocratic citizen of Jerusalem, and the well-fed money-changers, Christ himself was not a person of common sense. This opinion was not that of Brother Bernard, the kind and patient, or of Brother Giles, the loving and literal, or of Brother Junipero, who was one of the *jongleurs du bon Dieu*, but perhaps it was of Brother John, who wore a hat

ST. FRANCIS CONSOLING THE FRIAR WHO DOUBTED HIS AFFECTION

and left the community because he could not see how sensible men could live without money. If the farmers did not employ the brothers, they had to live on what they could beg. Roots and edible leaves, without the condiments that Francis loved in his salads, were, with cold water, often their only portion. The gray of the olive-tree, the speckled red-and-white roses, and the changing sky, held great consolation for the little band, and Francis, singing of the wonders of God in nature, kept love aflame within their hearts.

To-day we ask with Brother John, who was probably not the Judas some of the shocked brethren believed him to be, but only a practical person who wished to have his own way, How could they be happy on nothing a day?

It must be remembered that at this time Francis was not thinking of improving the general condition of labor. A beggar who asked alms and a great prince, with a magnificent court, were equal in his eyes, though he loved the beggar more because he was poor. Francis did not work for the laborer alone;

he worked for everybody, and everybody must pray or work or beg for everybody else, that the kingdom of Christ on earth might be fulfilled. As he grew older, and the counsels of prudence and common sense prevailed among his brethren, and they became learned, and ceased to wear the meanest clothes and to live in mud-thatched huts, his heart wept. One day he left his cell for a few moments, and a friar came to him.

"Whence came you, Brother?" he asked.

"I came from your cell," the friar replied.

"Since you have called it mine," Francis answered, "let another dwell there, and not I."

His brothers who were near him many times heard him say, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

What could people of common sense do with such a man? He had forced the hard-headed Innocent III to bless his "impossibilities" cordially, and all of a sudden the whole world was running after him. Unless we have something in our hearts that yearns to love as he loved, we must put this phenomenon down to

the mysteries of the medieval heart. New brethren came flocking to Portiuncula. Brother Thomas of Celano in his rhetorical way tells us that the brethren really loved one another. They recited the breviary as though they were priests, ever and anon crying out in spiritual and vocal unison, "Our Father who art in heaven!"

ANECDOTES OF FRANCIS

THE heart of the time would be wholly exalted or not at all. Francis said to the man who was willing to give his money to his relatives, but not to the poor: "Go, Brother Fly! Go!" With Francis, "Brother Fly" was a term of reproach. Fired by his preaching, an ardent young peasant, driving two oxen, came in his way.

"What shall I do to be saved?" asked the honest man.

"Give all you have to the poor."

The peasant unharnessed one of the oxen. "This one," he said, "I will take with me when I go to the Portiuncula; that one I will give to the poor."

Francis, who had rejected all the property of rich disciples, smiled at the simplicity of the man. "I accept," he said; "yet first let us see your father and mother."

But the old folks made difficulties. They regretted the loss of their son, but quite as much they seemed to regret the loss of the ox.

"Let us make a bargain," Francis said. "I will take your son, and give you back his ox." The chronicler leads us to believe that the old couple were willing to agree to this.

The power of Francis with all animate things was marvelous. This is one fact that permeates all the legends, and on which all his biographers agree. And he had the gift of reading the minds of those he loved. There is a story of a young friar who believed that Francis disliked him. One day when this brother was particularly unhappy, thinking that the dislike of Francis meant some serious fault on his part, some ingrained sin, for he knew that Francis loved all created things, the dew of refreshment fell upon him. Francis read his mind and said: "Come to me. Whenever you desire to talk of heavenly things,

come to me." And the forlorn young man was made happy.

THE WOLF OF GUBBIO

WHETHER the story of the conversation of Francis with the wolf of Gubbio is true or not, or, as has been suggested, it is a sublimated version of his interview with the haughty patricians of Assisi and their former slaves, the plebeians, it is certain that the children and the simple-hearted prefer to believe that the wolf was a real wolf; and children and the simple-hearted are nearer to God than most of us. The story of Francis, who was a saint largely because he was *un uomo de genio*, is so wonderful that to be on the side of the children and of the angels is the only way of understanding it. It cannot be in the least comprehended from the modern analytical point of view. The devil, as Coventry Patmore says, was the first analyst, and we all know what happened to *Marguerite* after she tore the daisy to pieces.

The story of the wolf of Agobio (Gubbio) is told in the twenty-first chapter of "I Fio-

retti." It seems that at one time Francis dwelt in the city of Gubbio. Now, the citizens were very unhappy because there was a wolf near the town, and the wolf gave them no peace by day or night. Mothers were afraid to let their children play about. The men were armed, but so furious was this beast that even weapons seemed useless against him, or at least the men were afraid to use them. The fright of the men might not have moved Francis, but the terror of the mothers and children he could not endure; and, then, in his opinion both the citizens and the wolf were to blame. The wolf had never been spoken to of Christ, and he acted only according to his nature; for wolves must eat. The citizens had not remembered that he was God's creature, and that, therefore, they should have made a friend of him. Francis determined to force the beast to hear reason. Despite the advice of the people, he went out to meet the wolf, making the sign of the cross. His brethren accompanied him part of the way, but waited at a safe distance with the people who had come out to view the fearful sight.

The wolf rushed at Francis with open mouth. Francis made over him the sign of the cross, and said gently:

"I command thee, Brother Wolf, on the part of Christ, that you do not do harm to me or anybody."

Upon this the terrible wolf lay down like a lamb at the feet of Francis. He had been addressed properly, — a thing which had never happened before, — and he was willing to hear reason.

"Brother Wolf," continued Francis, "you have done great evil here, hunting and killing God's own without His permission, and not only eating animals, but men created in the image of God; and so you have made yourself a thief and a murderer of the worst kind, and deserve to be hanged like a criminal. And everybody hates you, and voices that hatred. But I would make peace between you and the men of Gubbio, if you will offend no more. They will pardon you, and neither men nor dogs shall molest you."

The wolf, who had not eaten people maliciously or for amusement, but because he was

ST. ALBERT'S COLLEGE LIBRARY

hungry, showed by the expression of his eyes and the movements of his head and tail that he agreed with Francis and was willing to accept his decision. But Francis, according to the manner of the Middle Ages, exacted a symbol of the good faith of the wolf. Brother Wolf must give his paw upon it, on condition that Francis would see that the people of Assisi fed him every day. This peace having been arranged, the wolf, much to the amazement of the citizens, meekly followed Francis to hear him preach. Francis told them that sin was the occasion of the evils that befell them. The flames of God's punishment, he said, with the wolf standing near him and listening attentively, are more terrible than the teeth of an animal that can destroy only the body. "Go, then, dear brethren, to God, and do penance for your offenses against Him, and He will save you from the flames of hell."

And then Francis asked Brother Wolf again to put his right paw into his right hand, in the presence of witnesses, as a pledge that he would keep his part of the agreement; for Francis no doubt felt that it would be hard,

CHILDREN OF ASSISI FEEDING THE WOLF OF GUBBIO

unless his brother was impressed with the nature of the oath, to keep him from returning to his pagan ways; and perhaps, after all, the wolf might be tempted to find amusement by chasing the terrified men of Assisi into their houses.

Everybody in Gubbio, happy at the prospect of peace, blessed Francis as with one voice. After this, Brother Wolf became a great favorite in Gubbio; he went from house to house, a cherished friend, and the children played with him as though he were a big dog, and the dogs themselves, out of respect for Francis, did not bark at him. Two years later, when Brother Wolf died of old age, Gubbio grieved heartily because "While he went about the place gently," he recalled "vividly the virtue and holiness of St. Francis."

FRANCIS AND THE TURTLE-DOVES

Francis believed that God gave special grace to those who loved his little sisters and brothers, the birds and the beasts. Even Brother Fly, though Francis evidently did not look upon him as of the elect, like the lambs and

the doves, was not to be called accursed. One day Francis met a youth of amiable appearance on his way to market with a number of turtle-doves in a cage. Now, Francis loved doves, they were so gentle and so affectionate, and had not the Madonna herself offered them in the temple?

"*O buone giovane*," he said, "give unto me these birds, which are in holy writ compared to chaste and humble souls, so that they may not fall into cruel hands and be killed."

And the young man, by the grace of God, gave the cage of doves to Francis. And then Francis looked into the youth's eyes and said sweetly:

"Little son, thou wilt later be a brother in this order, and serve Jesus Christ most graciously."

And so in time the good youth became one of the blessed order of Francis, and died in the grace of God, which Francis had sought for him because he enabled him to set the doves free. And to the doves he said:

"O my little pure doves, my little sisters, simple, innocent, chaste, why did you let

yourselves be taken? See, I snatch you from death, and give nests to you, wherein you may increase and multiply, according to the commandment of the Creator."

Francis made nests for them at the Portiuncula, and without fear they lived with their families among the brethren, by whom they were fed. And after they had been fed, they would not go away until Francis had given them his blessing.

The mighty love in the heart of Francis drew all pure-hearted things to him, and gave him power to work what men called miracles. There are many records of his way with sinners; for no sinner was hopeless in his eyes, and there was no sinner who might not be called his brother. His power over all hearts was most evident in the marvelous episode of the conversion of Santa Clara.

THE CONVERSION OF SANTA CLARA

No great movement has ever succeeded without the help of a great woman. And the point of view of the greatest saints of the church concerning women has been blurred by over-

ascetic biographers, who are more or less tainted with Gnosticism, which, with all due respect to other people's opinions, was a forerunner of Calvinism. The saints, who were men engaged in doing noble acts for the love of God, did not look on women as undesirable. On the contrary, in many cases, they found them so desirable that their only safety was to flee from an attraction to which they were only too susceptible. Modern ideas of purity are not the ideas of the early fathers or of the Middle Ages. The Song of Solomon was not looked on as a part of the Old Testament to be handled furtively. The man who sacrificed the earthly love, in the highest sense the prelude to a more celestial passion, did not surrender it because it was evil, but because, in giving it up, he made the supreme surrender. If to fine souls human passion is the gateway to a passion that is superhuman, there are souls that need not the long approach, but who enter at once into that holy place where heart and soul meet in an atmosphere from which all that is earthly has disappeared. In the psychology of the saints this is most

common. Abelard, though he had saintly potentialities, was not strong enough to be a saint. Women have always been coadjutors in the work of God for this world. The reform which Francis began would have been incomplete without the "Lady Clara," the little flower of St. Francis.

When an enraptured girl elopes at midnight in our day to meet her future husband, nobody but the prudent condemn. In the Middle Ages even the prudent did not condemn, and similarly there was little condemnation for a maiden who, drawn by love of God, made her way to a convent. So when Clara, having listened to Francis in the cathedral of Assisi, determined to follow him in the way of poverty, only her male relatives were indignant, and they were considered to be very unreasonable by all the women of their families, and rather foolish by the people who were their neighbors. "For who can go against the Holy Spirit?" they asked. Clara was eighteen years of age when she listened to Francis. She had heard of him, of course, for her little world was full of his name. Besides, her cousin Rufino was

of the "religious," as they called the order. Probably Francis saw her in church, as Dante saw Beatrice, and marked her for his own. She probably visited the Portiuncula with her aunt or her mother, Ortolana, to see Friar Rufino. It is certain that she met Francis many times, always in "honorable company." In the turmoil of the wars about her she longed for peace and to follow Christ as Francis had done, and to follow him literally, becoming as absolutely poor as she could.

She was the daughter of a rich and noble family. Her father, Favorino, was one of the family of Scefi, and seignior of the castle of Sasso Rosso — at least they say so at Assisi. He had determined to make a good marriage for the charming little Clara; but after she had heard Francis, she would have no suitor, and at eighteen, according to the popular opinion of Assisi, was in danger of becoming an old maid. Was not *Juliet* of Verona quite capable of falling in love at an earlier age? Thomas of Celano, who loves to play on words, says of her, "Admirabilis femina *clara* vocabulo et virtute — *clara* satis genere traxit originem,"

etc. The name of her mother, which means the cultivator of a garden, gives him another chance for a pun, and two years after her death, Pope Alexander IV, in his bull of canonization, takes the opportunity to make a play on the word "Ortolana." Her mother was of the noble family of Fiumi. Born in 1194, Clara was much younger than Francis.

The day — it was Palm Sunday — came when she chose between the world and poverty. She went to mass for the blessing of the palms, arrayed in all the splendor of new spring garments, as was the custom. Her companions, beautifully adorned, went forward to take the palms from the hands of the prelate. Clara held back. Did she hesitate and wait for a sign? If so, the sign came. The priest went down to where she humbly stood, and gave her the branches with his own hands. The palm of utter sacrifice for the love of Christ was to be hers. The people were not surprised. The repute of her sanctity was in men's mouths. A prophecy of it had been made to Ortolana before Clara was born, and when a child, having no rosary, she made

beads of pebbles. Many other edifying things were told of her.

On the night of the following Monday, March 19, 1212, Clara, with her Aunt Pacifica and others, broke through a closed-up door in her father's house. She would not pass through the usual opening, for only those who never returned went through the door of the dead in old Italian houses, and she would never return.

Francis and his brethren, torches in hand, for the town and country were asleep, waited for her. Francis to her represented Christ. He was her guide to the salvation of her neighbor and her own soul, for the essential Franciscan doctrine was that one saved one's soul in saving one's neighbor. Christ sacrificed all for the world, which would, he knew, be ungrateful. Clara ardently desired to be one with Christ, to continue his sacrifice, as Francis interpreted its meaning. Since the holy church approved of Francis, she could have no doubt that he lived according to the counsels of the gospel. She would pray night and day for those who could not or would not pray; she

CLARA RECEIVING HER SISTER AGNES

would crucify herself daily by giving up all the luxuries of her existence, by becoming utterly dependent on the will of God. Her secret garden was to be the chapel of St. Damian's, that gray little building, to-day the same, among its pomegranates and olive-trees. Francis had builded better than he knew in saving it from ruin, for later it was to be the abode of her who was to be with him the co-redeemer of his country. Her aunt and the "honorable company" with her divested her of her ornaments, for she had come as a bride, and her luxuriant hair was cut off. Henceforth she was vowed to holy poverty and to the service of the poor in body and spirit, for all poverty is not physical. Mass had been said just after midnight in St. Damian's, and an hour after dawn Francis and his brethren walked to the monastery of St. Paul, which belonged to the nuns of the order of St. Benedict, "therein," as Thomas of Celano says, "to rest until Almighty God could otherwise provide."

When the day came, the relatives of Clara filled the town with their clamor. She should

be brought back. Who was this fool Francis, late a silly youth, to stand between Clara and a good marriage that would benefit both the family of Scefi and the Fiumi? The kinsmen of Clara — her woman-relatives were all with her in heart — rushed forth armed to retake her, but she would not be retaken. She showed her tonsured head and held fast to the altar-cloths. "I will be the bride of no man," she said; "I have chosen the better part. I am the bride of Christ." In deference to public opinion at last the infuriated men accepted the situation. All Assisi held that her father might choose a husband for her whether she liked it or not, but that, when it came to the question of a religious vocation, her rights were not to be infringed. In the Middle Ages the only freedom for a woman was the freedom of the convent.

SHE FOUNDS THE ORDER OF POOR LADIES

With her mind at rest, Clara went to the church of St. Angelo di Panza, and thence to that of St. Damian. Here she founded the monastery of the order of Poor Ladies. Her

young sister Agnes soon followed her into the cloister. At this second flight the Scefi were exceedingly wroth. They rushed to St. Damian's and tore the young girl from her sister's arms; but the chroniclers tell us that by a miracle the body of Agnes became so heavy that the united strength of her captors failed, and they were obliged to leave her in the road. When her uncle tried to strike her, his arm was smitten by a terrible pain. She, too, was clothed in the beast-colored robe of the order of Poor Ladies, her girdle of jewels and ribbons was exchanged for a plain cord, and there was no reason for her to wear her pearl-woven cap, for her hair was cut off. She was now so poor that even nature's adornment was denied her. These two began the religious order now known as Poor Clares, which spread with incredible rapidity over Europe.

At first the little community lived only by manual labor. Clara embroidered exquisitely, as is evident from the beautiful alb still preserved in the church of Santa Clara, and Agnes had also been well taught to use her hands.

A certain number of the friars were commanded by Francis to provide for their needs. These were lay brothers, known as Zealots of the Poor Ladies. It was their duty to beg for the necessaries of life for their poor charges. As a rule the Poor Ladies never went beyond their garden, and as the order increased, a little house was also provided for the ministering Franciscan priest and for the Zealots. To the end, even after the death of Francis, Clara persisted in the rule of utter poverty. When, late in her life, Gregory IX was made pope, she received him at St. Damian's. He begged her to accept some possessions; it was impossible that women could exist in a community without property.

"If it is thy vow that stands in the way," he said, "we absolve thee from it."

"Holy father," she answered, "absolve me from my sins, but I do not wish to be absolved from following the way of Christ." Against the most violent opposition she persevered in putting into practice the rule of absolute poverty given to her by Francis, and it was not until the day before her death that she suc-

ceeded in obtaining the bull from the pope authorizing her communities to be entirely poor.

HER CHARACTER AND WORK

As her reputation for sanctity grew, hundreds of women, young and old, became fired with the order to sacrifice all for Christ and their neighbors. They demanded peace, they demanded love. One has only to read European history of that period to find out how little love or peace there was. If Christianity offered the bread of life, there was only one way of grasping it. This was to do what Christians feared to do — to have no reserves in sacrifice. In his "Life of Clara," Thomas of Celano said, "Now, through old age, the weak world was rapidly failing, the eyes of belief growing blinder, its steps shambling, and its strength for virile acts ebbing, and corruption walked abreast with senility." Queens, princesses, like Agnes of Bohemia, followed the example of Clara, and in beds of splendid and luxuriant roses grew the silence that raises the heart. In the beginning Clara would not accept the place of abbess. She

would be least of all. She nursed her sisters, bathed the feet of serving-women, because they were poor and labored hard. She would often light the lamps and ring the bell for prayers before her community arose. She would allow others to do nothing that she could do herself. Very often in the cold of the night she arose and covered the sleepers. To those who were not fit to follow the strict rule, she was most lenient. Her sisters might not leave the monastery except for a reasonable cause. The lay sisters, who served outside, were forbidden to gossip. The chaplain — Clara would have none but a Franciscan — must not enter the monastery without a companion, and when they entered they were obliged to remain in an open place, so that they might always be seen by each other and by others.

Francis found great consolation in Clara's aid; but she was so humble that all joy and hope seemed to come to her from Christ through him. Life in the Middle Ages, I must repeat, was sacramental to those who desired the better part. All grace and all good were conveyed by symbols, and to devout

souls, and even to believing sinners, Francis was one of the physical symbols of God. Francis pointed out to Clara greater heights of perfection. To him she gave hope; she smoothed, too, for the community of men many of the difficulties of daily life, which might have disturbed their peace. The mending and sewing for the friars, the making of their altar linen — all these things were looked after by Clara and her nuns. And no doubt the friars accepted certain ameliorations of their lot without knowing how these ameliorations were brought about. During a cold winter, when he was ill, Francis was induced to have part of his habit lined with common fur; but he insisted that a piece of this fur should be sewn on the outside, so that the world would know how luxurious he was. The good nuns probably managed this.

Francis, humbly fearing the adoration of Clara, seldom visited her, though their souls seemed almost one. On his deathbed, in 1226, in answer to Clara's request that she might see him, he said to one of the friars: "Go to Sister Clara and tell her to put away all sadness, and

say to her, too, that she and her sisters will meet me after death and be greatly comforted."

But both knew much anxiety and much tribulation before the day of his death. In the meantime Clara seemed to divine his secret thoughts, and when the wounds of our Lord were impressed on his body, she knew or guessed the secret, and made such foot-gear as enabled him to walk, and such sleeves as concealed from the eyes even of his brethren the sacred marks on his hands. Yet this gentle creature set a troop of Frederick II's Saracens to flight, and stood with all her might against the relaxation of the rule which Rome, seeing through the eye of prudence and common sense, tried to force upon her. The third order of St. Francis, which was to give a stunning blow to feudal privileges, was to succeed close upon the foundation of the second order, — that of the Poor Ladies, — following implicitly in the way of Francis.

IV

ST. FRANCIS AND THE PEOPLE

AS he grew older, Francis longed more and more for fullness of union with Christ. This was the beginning and the end, the very substance of all his desires. He wished to live in the heart of Christ; above all to suffer, if possible, the very pangs, physical and mental, that Christ suffered for the love of man. In the earlier days when Francis had only begun to long for this union in love and suffering, Christ appeared to him at St. Damian's, St. Bonaventure, his biographer, tells us, as a living figure upon the cross.

Eighteen years after the divine love first took entire possession of him, Christ in the form of a seraph rewarded his ecstatic desire, "leaving," as the same St. Bonaventure says, "a wonderful fire in his heart, and a no less wonderful sign impressed on his

flesh. For there began to appear immediately in his hands and in his feet the appearance of nails as he had seen them in the vision of the Crucified." But in 1213 the crown of his mystic longing had not been given to him.

Francis loved his fellows because Christ loved them. For this sole reason he began to speak in the language of his country. In the beginning of his mission he had used the Provençal, his mother's tongue, which was fashionable among poets before Dante had created the language that was to be national. He must speak to the people. Good acts that could be understood by them were not enough; he must reach their hearts by the living word, and so he sung his hymns to them in the language of their homes.

In the sixth year of his conversion, about 1213, he became the first Italian poet. In prose, to his brothers in the world, he wrote in Latin when he wrote at all, — "ad universo Christi fideles," — but he sang now in the speech of Umbria, and he seldom preached without singing. It was the custom of the

friars to preface their sermons with a rousing hymn, often impromptu, in the speech of the "vulgar." Without the poetry of Francis as his example, without the taste for the Italian songs Francis created, Dante might have written in Latin, and Ariosto, too. What, then, would have become of the Italianate beauties of Spenser and young Milton? "Viva Jesu! Viva Maria!" called out the listeners in 1213, as they do in Italian churches to-day.

THE METHODS OF THE WESLEYS

The disciples of John and Charles Wesley in mingling hymns with preaching and ejaculations were only following the way of Francis. If there is a curious parallel between the methods of the Wesleyans and the early Franciscans, there is an equally curious parallel between the ideas of Francis as promulgated in his third order and those of George Fox and the Quakers. The mysticism of St. Catharine of Genoa and the early Quakers are not so far apart as they seem. The foundation of the third order forced for a time a truce of peace to exist in Italy. Francis would have the

practical blessing of love extended to all men. There were those who could live solely in the mystical contemplation of Christ; these were few. The many must find other roads to peace. "He who appears to you to be a child of the devil," was the burden of his preaching, "may to-morrow be a pillar of God's house." There were those living in the world who would become children of the devil if they left their daily duties to become as he was. He knew this, and he longed to make their way of life more like that laid down in the gospels; for, since Christ had died for all souls, he longed to live and to die for them. In his Father's house on earth there were many rooms beside the little cells in which he and his brethren dwelt.

FRANCIS AND HUMAN LOVE

He blessed the true love of the youth and the maid, as he blessed the nests of the doves, and it is recorded that for two spouses who loved each other during a long life he obtained the grace that they might die together. This was the case of Lucchesio and Bona Donna, and it occurred long after the death of Francis,

ST. FRANCIS AND THE BIRDS

when they departed for that joy "which makes all the pains of earth seem cheerful because of the hope of it." It was to make men more faithful husbands and wives and mothers truer to their vocation that the third order was founded.

He loved the joys of domestic life. To have children of his own would have given him great happiness; but this he sacrificed that he might have thousands of spiritual children. "Each to his vocation"; in the Franciscan chapel there were many niches. For the apostles there must not be wife or child or earthly love. They must be free for the sacrifice.

In his earlier life, tormented by the longings of young manhood, Francis had more than once plunged himself into pits of ice and snow. "Brother Ass," he said to himself, "thou art unworthy; thou art fit only to be beaten." And on one occasion, when the vision of a happy home came before him, he ran into a mass of newly fallen snow in the garden, and of the snow he made seven mounds. "Behold," he said, "this biggest pile is thy wife, these

ST. ALBERT'S COLLEGE LIBRARY

four are thy daughters and thy sons, — two of each, — the other two are thy man-servant and thy woman-servant. Mind, Brother Ass; for these thou must trouble thyself to provide. Hasten, then; go at once to clothe them, or they will die in this intemperate winter. If this oppress thee, if this weary thee, how much easier is it for thee to trouble thyself for the one Lord?" He warned his brethren of the stupidity of Brother Ass, as he called the body, which needed, he said, to be beaten that it might obey every mood of its master, the spirit.

For those who could follow the doctrine of Christ, there were other ways to heaven: for the youth, love and marriage; for the mature, children and the cares of life; and for the old, the sunset glow of conjugal love. But for Francis himself all these beautiful things did not exist; and yet he must bear the yoke of the Lord cheerfully. Uncheerful sacrifice he would not tolerate. To Francis a singing brigand had more signs of grace than a gloomy friar. Since Christ had arisen and was in his heaven, what real sorrow could there be in

the world? Browning caught an echo of this in Italy —

The world a place for Joy and Peace.

First, the world must, in the name of Christ, be joyful; it must be peaceful. How could it be peaceful when a feudal lord had the right to force men to fight in every trivial cause his caprice or his pride invented? Men could not be joyful if they were worried by the knowledge that their possessions might be seized by this same feudal lord, and their wives and children left penniless. How could the poor be joyful when the rich hated them and gave them naught but scorn and left them naked and starving? There was Lucchesio, who afterward died such a good death — a death which all true lovers might envy. He was a rich dealer in Poggibonsi. He was so rich and clever that he cornered the grain of the neighborhood, and the poor suffered accordingly. He looked on this as a legitimate occupation for a Christian man of business until Francis made him the first member of the third order — the order of men and women living in the world. Whereat his wife Bona Donna was

very glad, for the women were always on the side of Francis. There were thousands of business men like Lucchesio in Italy who took all they could, and gave away with a deep feeling of righteousness what they did not care to keep. Francis said to Lucchesio that there were only two things in the world, God and a man's soul, and to know God and to purge his soul of all that was unlike God was all. "Read the gospels," he said, "but only that you may act them," and the counsel that he gave to Lucchesio was what he said to every man and woman who lived the normal life of men and women in the world. Now he became, within the comprehension of the world, everybody's Francis; for to everybody he now appealed.

The contemplative life was the life Christ himself had declared to be "better," although he accepted the ministration of Martha. Brother Giles, that fervent disciple of Francis, said: "There are seven degrees in the contemplative life: fire, unction, ecstasy, contemplation, taste, rest, and glory. The contemplative life is to leave all things for the glory of God, to seek only things heavenly, to pray untir-

ingly, to read often with attention, to praise God continually by hymns and canticles. To contemplate is to be separated from all, and to be united to God alone." And Brother Giles said also: "Since no one can enter upon the contemplative life unless he has first faithfully and devoutly practised in the active life, it behooveth that the active life be pursued with toil and with all solicitude." Martha, busy with much serving, was chided by the Lord because she asked Mary to help her, and yet she did not cease from her work.

In the Franciscan philosophy, he was goodly active who built bridges and churches and hospitals, who fed and clothed the poor, and persevered in these works, despite rebukes that even seemed to come from heaven. "If a man were to live a thousand years," said Brother Giles, "and were to have nothing to do beyond his own lips, he would have sufficient to do within his own heart, nor would he be able to come to a perfect end, so much would he have to do within his heart alone. He who doth not make himself two persons, a judge and a master, cannot be saved."

AN OUTLINE OF THE RULE FOR THE THIRD ORDER

In the year 1215, Francis had a return of the fever that had attacked him in Spain, where he had zealously gone, as he went to many other places, to preach to all peoples and nations. He was too ill to preach, so he wrote to all the faithful from the Portiuncula. He was assisted by Brother Pacifico, who had been a poet in the world. In this letter we find the essentials of the rule which he is supposed to have given to the third order. First of all, those who would follow God must learn the lesson of love from the sacrament of the mass, in which Christ, in the substance of the most common of the food elements, bread and wine, gives his glorified body and blood for the nutrition of the soul. Then peace must actively come after love. He, Francis, must be, like Christ, free from family ties and the burden of property, and his immediate followers must be likewise free. For them was both the active and the contemplative life; but for the whole world, no. The work

of the world, in the name of Christ, must be carried on by human means. God Himself, in sending His Son as man, had done this; He had dignified human relations.

THE THIRD ORDER AND FEUDALISM

In the Middle Ages it would have amazed men to assert that God did not work by visible things, or that the most ordinary actions of life were not part of His scheme. The very "coarseness" which we find so repugnant to our modern ideas of delicacy is often a not irreverent way of admitting that nothing human is evil in itself. Visible and invisible life were one in the union of the fatherhood of the Creator. Every member of the third order must be a man of peace. Later, the founders of the Quakers made this a condition, too, but they did not live in an age when people were so literal or so simple or so logical. This rule of love and peace, spreading through Italy, gave feudalism a violent blow. If a lord could not force his clients to take up arms at his command, what was to become of the rule, right or wrong, of the lord? Then the mem-

bers of the third order must make their wills. This was another blow for the feudal lords, who could not, against law and public opinion, fostered by the omnipresent friars, seize the goods of widows and orphans, enslaving these helpless creatures by making them their wards.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE THIRD ORDER

In 1221, Francis developed the seed we find in his letter to all the faithful in Christ, which was written in 1215. "The brethren shall bear no offensive arms unless in defense of their faith and their country." Swearing and dueling, and the common amusements of the higher classes, as later depicted in Boccaccio's "Decameron," were forbidden. We are told that it was the converted merchant Lucchesio who gave Francis the stimulus to form this society for persons living in the world. Lucchesio had been eager for success; he displayed his wealth on all occasions, and his wife, Bona Donna, whom he loved passionately, had been of the world worldly. Francis, too, by his insistence that the smallest detail of life might be sanctified by divine love,

helped to kill the mock-heroic, chivalric extravagances he had practised in his youth. To be great in the eyes of the world, it was no longer necessary to be grandly heroic. To be great in the eyes of Christ, one might do many little things unknown to the world; but above all, one must be cheerful, for Christ must be served with joy. Not even the greatest physical pain should drive out the joy of suffering for the love of God. But faith and prayer are useless without works. Those who are rich must use their riches for the good of others. They need not be eccentric. One cannot be outwardly poor in the courts of kings, but one may be always poor in spirit. Golden copes and precious chalices for the service of the King of kings, yes, and pearls and velvet to honor a temporal prince; but for those who would serve according to the gospel there should be nothing for their own vanity. Magnificence was right where one's state of life demanded it, but ostentation never.

In this letter of 1215, Francis gives a description of the death of the rich man who had not loved God and had trusted in men. "Wilt

thou do penance for all thy sins?" asked the priest of the dying man.

He answered, "I will."

"Wilt thou from thy substance, as far as thou canst, satisfy for what thou hast done and for the things in which thou hast defrauded and deceived men?"

He answered, "No."

And the priest said, "Why not?"

"Because I have put everything in the hands of my relatives and friends."

He began to lose the power of speech, and then the miserable man died a bitter death. "After this," Francis said, "his relatives and friends cursed him for not having left them more than he did."

The Brothers and Sisters of Penance must make restitution during their lives, and not wait for death-bed repentance.

Moreover, their hands must always be open to the poor and the sick, and they must bury the dead.

POVERTY ABOVE ALL

All Europe was amazed at the change in public sentiment wrought by the manner in

which Francis applied the counsels of the gospel to actual life. It became unfashionable to be avaricious. Feuds ceased for a time, because hatred was denounced by this wonderful creature. The Capulets and the Montagues kissed one another on the cheeks, knelt at the same altar, and wondered why they had never known peace before.

Retainers of haughty barons, who to all intents and purposes had been slaves, now became free men. "Not to us, poor little Brothers of Christ," said Francis, "shall you give house and lands, but each year a fixed portion of your earnings to the poor and the homeless. We are no better, surely, than He who had no place to lay His head. Leave us in poverty, but help not only with gold, but with love, those who suffer." The spirit of love and of freedom vitalized Italy, or, rather, from the heart of love rose the soul of freedom.

There was a higher power on earth than the omnipotent feudal lord. The Franciscan spirit had entered into the hearts of Lucchesio and Bona Donna, and Francis, visiting their home, simple and peaceful, had asked why all good

Christians in the world could not live as they lived, in love and peace. But the secular authorities did not look on the penitents of the third order with favor. In 1221, at Rimini, the *podestà* decreed that they must swear to take up arms at the demand of the local authorities. The conflict became so fierce that Pope Honorius III had to settle it by placing the brethren of the third order under the protection of the Bishop of Rimini. In many cities the brethren were highly taxed unless they would bear arms in local quarrels. Honorius, and later Gregory IX, came to the rescue, and the third order increased, gradually killing the worst tyrannies of feudalism.

In the name of Christ the common people sheathed their swords and said: "We will not fight the battles of hatred merely that a man may possess more lands and castles. We do not work for wages," said these men, made joyful by the teachings of Francis; "we work that we may live to perpetuate love and peace." To give cheerfully and to receive cheerfully; not to give alms as a condescension, and not to accept them as a humiliation, was to be the rule.

The beggar who could work, and would not, was sinning; the beggar who could not work, and yet looked on his necessity as a curse instead of a blessing, likewise sinned.

The paraphernalia of business Francis regarded as dangerous. Nevertheless, it must be endured and even used for the greater glory of God by folk in the world. Asceticism in the Puritan sense Francis did not understand. All things were good, and to be used with joy; but not by him and those who, like him, were called to sacrifice these good things for the love of Christ.

THE ROBBERS OF MONTE CASALE

The story of his treatment of the robbers of Monte Casale was typical of his point of view — a point of view, like most of the views of Francis, by no means modern. Angelo had been a very charming and attractive youth, the fine flower of generations of breeding, delicate, yet strong. He wished to be a friar. Francis looked at him. He seemed like a fine greyhound and unfitted for the hardships of a life of poverty.

"Father," said Angelo, "I am a man such as you, and by the grace of Christ, I can endure as you endure."

Francis accepted him, and was so pleased with him that he made him guardian at Monte Casale. In this territory there happened to live three robbers who occasionally committed murder. But the times became hard, and these men could not even make a living, and so they went to beg; but Angelo, who was still intolerant, used hard language to them. "Go, robbers and cruel murderers!" he said to them. And then he told them they were so vile and insolent that they dared to covet the small portion of food set aside for the servants of God.

Driven from the door, the three starving robbers went away cursing God and man. Young Angelo was pleased with himself, and when Francis came home with some bread and a bottle of wine of the country, Angelo told him the story of how he had rebuked the murderous thieves. But Francis was righteously angry. He reminded Angelo that the sick, not the healthy, needed a physician, and

ST. FRANCIS WITH THE THREE BRIGANDS

that those whose souls were ill through sin must be treated gently. Christ himself had loved sinners so much that he had often eaten in their company.

"Go," Francis commanded — "go find these sinners, give them this bread and wine, and kneel to them, confessing humbly your fault in treating them harshly." Then Angelo realized that they, too, were little ones of Christ, lacking as yet only good-will. Foot-sore, weary, perhaps, a little afraid of these undesirable citizens, he found them at last. They fell upon the food, for they were hungry, and in the meantime Francis prayed for them with all his heart.

When the robbers were refreshed, they said to Brother Angelo, "Let us go to the holy Francis," and they went, wondering that any man could be so good as not to hate them, for they knew best what they had done. Francis received them with distinguished consideration. They were in doubt whether even God could forgive them their terrible sins. But Francis told them that the mercy of God is greater than any sin, and, besides, St. Paul

had said that the blessed Christ had come on earth to redeem sinners. The robbers were touched. It was the business of the dear Christ to save such as they, if they would perform their part and repent. Delighted with this knowledge, they asked to be received among the friars. They thus renounced the devil and all his works. "Two were rewarded with early and happy deaths," the pious chroniclers tell us, "and the third remained on earth fifteen years, living so that the fast of Lent was a feast for him." Thus during all his life Francis loved sinners and worked for sinners; for in his theory the defiance of God's laws was a disease of the soul, as leprosy was a disease of the body.

SOME OF THE WAYS OF BROTHER JUNIPER

Brother Masseo of Marignano was very good and also very frank. He had none of the politeness of Brother Angelo, who had been bred in noble houses. Once Brother Masseo, perhaps doubting whether the humility of Francis could endure all the adulation he received, repeated several times: "Why

after thee? Why after thee? Why after thee?"

"Well, speak up," said Francis, somewhat weary of this reiteration. He knew the holiness of Brother Masseo, and for that reason cherished his words.

"Thou art not, Francis, good to look upon nor art thou of high birth nor art thou a scholar. It puzzles me to know why the world runs after thee."

Upon this, Francis humbly knelt and thanked God. And then he told Brother Masseo that God had looked from His heaven to find the meanest of creatures to do a great work — a creature so sinful that all the world might know that it was not the man that did this work, but the glory of God shining and working in him. And Masseo was pleased and satisfied.

Brother Juniper was specially dear to Francis. He was all charity and simplicity, but so literal that to the other brothers he was often a trial, and to those who had still some of the world in them a scandal. If little children were dear to the Lord, Francis argued, Juniper

must be very dear, for he was a little child. And the nearer in simplicity human beings were to little children and the doves and the lambs, the nearer they were to the spirit of the perfect love that casteth out fear. For instance, Brother Juniper took it into his head to exercise his humility, and went into Viterbo wearing only his breeches. Even the robe and the cord were too luxurious for him. As the public square was crowded, the thoughtless, not understanding the good intention of this innocent, howled in scorn or amusement, and even cast mud and stones at him. Thus persecuted, he was not permitted to leave Viterbo until late in the day. When he appeared with his bundle of clothes in his hand the brethren were indignant; they felt that he had disgraced them. They insisted that Francis ought to have him manacled as one mad. "No punishment is too bad for me," said Juniper. "Even let me return among the people in the dreadful manner in which I came here!"

Juniper loved his brethren much, but the poor even more. "Would that we had a

ST. FRANCIS AND BROTHER MASSEO

whole forest of Junipers!" said Francis, when this little fool of the good God had done something more innocently outrageous than usual.

At Greccio, Francis instituted the first Christmas celebration to make it the feast of the children; but of that later. The Penitents at Assisi were getting ready for this great festival, and the sacristan had exerted all his faculties and resources in decorating the altar. Some benefactors had given to the church a fringe of gold adorned with richly wrought silver bells. These were the pride of the sacristan's heart, though there were other ornaments almost equally worthy of the occasion; but he became hungry before the task of adornment was completed, and he begged Juniper to watch the altar until he came back from his meal. Juniper, who happened to be praying in the chapel, gladly consented. No sooner had the trustful sacristan gone than a woman came in to beg something for the love of Christ.

"Wait," said Juniper. "God will not miss alms for thee from all the richness of His altar." His eye caught the little silver bells on the

gold fringe. "God does not need these bells," he said; "they are unnecessary." Full of sympathy, he imitated the example of Francis at Foligno, and gave to the poor woman his Father's goods, cutting the precious bells off with his knife.

The sacristan had hardly begun to eat when experience recalled some of Juniper's little ways. "How idiotic I am," he thought, "to leave Juniper in charge of anything he can give to the poor!" Off he ran to the chapel, and he saw the worst — the mutilated fringe, which was to have glistened with silver bells under the candles of the midnight mass.

"Oh, don't bother about the bells," answered Juniper to the frenzied reproaches of the sacristan. "They were of no use; they were merely for worldly display, and the poor woman was in the greatest need."

The sacristan scoured the city for the woman with the precious bells, but in vain. Then he angrily exposed the case to the father guardian, who was so angry that, when rebuking Juniper in the chapter, he lost his voice. Brother Juniper delighted in being scolded;

so he was filled with love during the torrent of reproaches that fell upon him. "Poor father!" he thought, "he talks as though he had a cold; I must cure him." Off he went to the town to beg some hot porridge and butter. It took him some time to get just what he wanted, and he wanted it hot. It was nearly midnight when he reached the guardian's cell. In answer to his knock, the good man rose, and, candle in hand, looked at him.

"Dear Father," said Juniper, affectionately, offering the dish of porridge, "I noticed that your throat was tired when you scolded me to-day; therefore I have brought you this, which will act like an internal poultice."

"At such an hour!" cried the justly enraged guardian. "You ruffian, you scullion, you idiot!"

"Dear Father," responded Juniper, calmly, "we must not waste the porridge. Since you will not eat this good porridge, which was formerly hot, do me the kindness to hold the candle while I eat it." The guardian saw at once the good intention of Brother Juniper, and he doubtless had a sense of humor, too, for

they ate the porridge together. This story greatly pleased Francis.

Francis had no fear. If miracles sprang up in his path, like exotic flowers, wherever his feet touched, it was because he expected them of God, as a child expects daily bread of its father. What God did not do in the case of other folk did not in the least concern this simple child of faith. What he wanted he asked for; for had not his Lord said to him personally, "Ask and thou shalt receive?"

All his biographers tell us that, going boldly among the infidels, he almost converted the Sultan of Babylon, knowing, as he did, that the name of Christ was mentioned many times in the Koran and that the same book acknowledged the divine and uncarnal birth of Christ. The sultan was his brother and not so far removed from him as the less discerning thought. Among the Mohammedans in Morocco, during the crusade of St. Louis, he gained respect because he seemed possessed of the madness of charity. He loved the birds, and we are told in the "Mirror of Perfection," that he loved them more than ever at Christ-

mas time. "If I could talk to the emperor," he often said, "I would beg him that, for the love of God and me, he would command by law that no lark should be trapped or killed, and likewise on the day of our Lord's birth all rulers should oblige men to strew grain upon the roads, so that our sisters the larks and all other birds might have enough to eat; and that, because on that day the Son of God was born of the Blessed Virgin in a manger between an ox and an ass, all who have oxen and asses might out of reverence be forced to feed them well; and likewise the poor on that day should be abundantly fed by the wealthy."

FRANCIS THE FIRST TO MAKE CHRISTMAS A CHILDREN'S FESTIVAL

Francis loved the feast of Christmas because, "once our Lord was born, our salvation must follow." Little children who gather about the crib under the brightly lighted Christmas tree are fulfilling the hope of Francis, for it was he who made the first crib. Francis knew that it is better to see than to read, even better to see than to hear.

Not being a priest, he could not celebrate mass; but as deacon he could read the gospel aloud — that gospel which tells of the birth of Christ. And he would make hymns of his own, too; but this was not enough. He wanted the people of Greccio and Assisi, especially the children, and all the country around, to see our little Lord in the stable, as he saw him with the keen eye of love; for to Francis all things were sacramental. They were outward signs of spiritual essence. He applied to the pope for permission to add a new ceremonial to the celebration of the nativity, and on that still and beautiful night he had a manger filled with hay in which he laid a figure of the divine child. To this manger was brought the animals which had looked with delight at the new-born babe on the first Christmas morning. Francis lavished all possible care on this representation. Candles and torches shone on the faces of the delighted crowds that flocked to the chapel at Greccio to do honor to the symbol of the Lord. The heart of Italy was touched, and the simple peasants found a great need filled in this:

they had *seen*, and from that moment every new-born child and every animal had a certain sacred character for them. If all Italy did not become tender with the dumb, driven beasts, it was not the fault of Francis, who taught kindness to animals by showing that divinity had smiled on them.

THE INDULGENCE OF THE PORTIUNCULA

THE love of Francis for the humble Portiuncula and its little wood, which he loved even more intensely than Newman loved his room at Oxford, culminated when he wrested the famous indulgence of the Portiuncula from Pope Honorius III. It was a triumph that filled the ecclesiastical world with amazement, and made this humble chapel the center of attention in Europe. The emperor himself would have given much to have this indulgence bestowed on a basilica under his protection. Apart from the religious character, it was a great distinction, and the crowd of pilgrims it attracted would have helped to make any place rich and famous. The indulgence Francis demanded was the unique one reserved by

excellence for crusaders. In the early days the church insisted that sinners should do public penance before their sins could be satisfied for, after the spiritual guilt had been forgiven. There must be a temporal penance as well as the possible punishment in the progressive state after death, — purgatory, — through which the once guilty soul advanced nearer to the blessed vision of God.

As time passed, the church mitigated public penances by exchanging them for easier means of making earthly satisfaction for spiritual guilt. It was a foregone conclusion that a sin of theft, for instance, would not be forgiven, no matter how many absolutions were bestowed by the priests, unless restitution were made. But restitution was not enough, sorrow was not enough; there must be punishment, and beneficial punishment. Remission of the temporal punishment due to sin for a fixed time, after the spiritual guilt had been remitted, were common; but Francis asked that a plenary indulgence should be given so that every person who visited the chapel at Portiuncula, truly repenting of his sins and having

confessed and obtained absolution, "should be free of all punishment for sin from his baptism until the day he entered the chapel." If a Christian died with the temporal punishment for his sins unperformed, the prison of purgatory awaited him until his debt should be paid.

Some cardinals were astonished at the liberality of Honorius in giving Francis so much. As they said, "It might lessen the number of pilgrims to Rome and the Holy Land." But Francis seemed to have charmed this pontiff, as he had charmed the sultan and the birds. The Roman curia insisted, however, that the indulgence should be limited to a certain space of time within thirty-six hours.

After this, Francis was more joyful than usual. He had put his increasing crowd of poor friars under the protection of Rome. No man could now persecute them as heretics; they would be allowed to be utterly poor, utterly independent of the pomp of this world, since the destitute little Portiuncula had been more honored than St. Peter's itself. He feared wealth for his order more than all other evils, but he coveted for it the things of the

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spirit. Even some of the leaders had begun to act as if the Franciscan kingdom was of this world. This he sought to correct by laying stress on the spiritual honor the pontiff had bestowed on his poor little chapel; it was not a gift of gold or silver.

The absence of a corroboratory document giving the indulgence from Pope Honorius is explained by the characteristic refusal of Francis to accept a written confirmation of this great privilege. Even when Count Roland de Cattani gave to him the lonely Monte della Verna, in Tuscany, he had refused a deed of gift. It was for his use, but a legal deed would have made it his property, and in his last words to the brothers he commanded them not to accept from the Roman curia written privileges.

HIS DISLIKE FOR LEARNING IN HIS ORDER

Cardinal Hugolino, afterward Gregory IX, was the special protector of Francis. He insisted that Francis should preach before Pope Honorius and the sacred college. Francis said, "I am nothing, I know nothing."

But the cardinal insisted. The result justified the dislike of Francis for the carefully prepared sermon, written and memorized. Francis, drilling himself, learned an elaborate discourse by heart. The illustrious and exquisitely critical assembly waited. What would this celebrated friar say? How would he say it? Francis was abashed before the prelates who were splendid in purple and red, glittering with gold and amethyst, learned in style and dialectics. Much would depend on the impression this humble and wonderful creature made. Cardinal Hugolino felt his heart sink as Francis began to stumble and hesitate. How these learned men would despise this noble one, who really deserved their homage! It is recorded that Hugolino prayed with all his might for his protégé. Then Francis threw aside his artificial address, and broke forth into such an ardent appeal that the whole assembly wept with him and burned with the love of Christ. It was his first and last attempt at a carefully prepared sermon.

Francis discouraged learning among his brothers. His contemporary and friend,

Dominic, canonized later, might create a band of scholars and teachers, controversialists and philosophers, but for him and his poor little brothers the word of the gospel was enough; this they could hear even if they could not read. He feared science, but he loved poetry. Music and song might be loved, — they were one, — but technical distinctions in theology and philosophy he left to others. His friars might write the holy names in flowers in their gardens if they liked, for Francis, frugal as he was, would have some flowers in every garden. He seemed to say with the Eastern poet, "If I had two loaves of bread, I would give one for a hyacinth." The flowers were his friends. He would not tread ruthlessly on a little plant, because it might bear a lily, emblem of the purity of Christ; or on a rose, symbol of her who was the Rose of Sharon; nor would he permit a scrap of written parchment to be trodden on, for fear that it might hold the name of God. But books were best avoided. When one could live with nature and sing with nature, why should one read? he thought, not knowing that Seneca had long ago uttered

his thought: "If a house were given you, bright with marble, its roof beautifully painted with colors and gold, you would call it no small benefit. God has built for you a mansion that fears no fire or ruin." Sight was enough. Why should simple brothers, having this gift, long for learning? Francis would not permit one of his young friars who had asked him for it to have a psalter. Those who had learned to read might read the word of God; but why learn to read the black letters, even when illumined with gold and azure? Was not God's sky more splendid, and His love written there and everywhere? Book-learning he did not despise in others, but let his own little sheep remain in their simple pastures. Besides, books were only for the rich, and he and his were poor.

HIS LOVE OF POETRY AS A MEANS OF GRACE

When it was a question of poetry, the written words might be used to preserve a song. Francis was a born singer. Since the birds praised God in song and gave delight to the

world, could men do less? He had sung many songs, first of all those Provençal songs he had learned at his mother's knee; later the chansons of the fashionable troubadours, imported into Italy with French velvets and French wines; and also the Latin chants of the church by St. Ambrose and his followers. In 1224 he composed the "Canticles of the Sun" in his own tongue. Into his order there had come a great poet, Gulielmo Divini, who had been crowned with laurels in Rome. Divini, called the "king of poets," had gone to the Convent of Severino to hear the noted "singer of the good God," who called vices by their real names, and who would burn out the cancer sin with the fire of love with all pity for the sinner. Divini heard and was conquered. "Brother," he said, "lead me far from men, and give me God." He was the Brother Pacifico to whom Francis intrusted the work of correcting the song of his heart, the "Canticles of the Creatures," which Brother Leo had written at his dictation.

Before Francis gave to God and the world this poem of the sun and all created things, he

had changed the point of view among Christians as to the value of Christianity. He had taught them that the gospel must be the rule of life, and that the soul that wilfully resisted Christ's teachings was outside the church and dead. This he had done by the sacrifice of himself and by those miracles which men accepted without question, and which, in their eyes and his, were not so wonderful as the tears of a penitent sinner.

Francis, we are told, had many struggles with the demon; but he looked on joy and cheerfulness as qualities the demon hated. "Before me and others," he said to a brother, "try to be glad; for it is not seemly that a servant of Christ should show a troubled face before his brethren." Ordered gladness he loved, but not loud laughter. He even disapproved of himself when he laughed. "The servant of God," he said, "in eating, drinking, sleeping, and other corporal works, must discreetly fortify his body, so that Brother Body shall not have cause to murmur and to say, 'I cannot stand upright and attend to prayer, nor do any other good works, because you do

not satisfy my wants.'" Sadness and self-conceit were of the demon.

FRANCIS NOT OVER-ASCETIC

A BROTHER spoke of a poor man sneeringly. "He is poor, but his one desire is to be rich."

"Take off your tunic," commanded Francis, "and throw yourself naked at the feet of this poor man, confess your fault, and ask him to pray for you."

There was no room for pride in his scheme of life. To him the poor came before all. Once an old woman came to the Portiuncula. She had two sons in the order, and she begged of Francis. "Brother Peter," he asked, "what can we give our poor mother?"

"In all the house there is nothing that we can give her that will be of any use to her. Even in the church there is only the New Testament from which to read the lessons at matins."

"Give it to her," said Francis, "that she may sell it; for I believe firmly that this will be more pleasing to God and the Blessed Virgin than that we should read from it."

It is related that he knew without being told the needs of his brethren and their true thoughts. It was revealed to him that Brother Elias, the prudent man who tried to make the Franciscans worldly, would rebel against the rule and die out of the order. Elias noticed that Francis treated him coldly, and he asked the reason. Francis told him, and Elias wept.

"If I were in the midst of hell," he said, "and thou didst pray for me, I should receive some refreshment. Pray God for me, for it is recorded that if a sinner change his ways, God will revoke His sentence."

Francis, much moved, prayed with all his might. Later, after the Emperor Frederick of Sicily had persuaded this most learned Elias to rebel against the church and leave the order, the prayers of Francis brought him back, and he died wearing the habit of his master.

At the great meeting of the friars at the Portiuncula, where hundreds were fed and cared for as the lilies of the field, Francis obliged all the brethren who for the purpose of penitence wore sharp pointed instruments

to give them up. We may be sure that the ascetic Brother Elias did not approve of this. In the reports of the time men were healed, dried vineyards brought forth fruit, all things were given, when Francis asked in the name of love. Of strange occurrences like these, of the wonder of his vision in the camp of the crusaders, who were defeated because they would not listen to him, of his offer to be burned by his little Brother Fire in order that the sultan might be converted, pages might be written; but the greatest marvel was to come.

FRANCIS RECEIVES THE STIGMATA

From the beloved Portiuncula he had gone to the place of the birds, the cold steeps of the mountain of Alvernia. It is a great rock crowned with birches and pines. To-day it is as it was in 1224, thanks to Pope Alexander IV, who forbade, under penalty of excommunication, the cutting of the trees. Above the world, but still in it, Francis sat with his brethren. It had been hard work for the holy man to reach this deserted place. He had been obliged to ride part of the way on an ass.

"Who are you?" asked the peasant who led the ass. "Are you Brother Francis of Assisi? If you are, my advice is to try to be as good as people say you are, so they will not be disappointed." Francis knelt and thanked him.

Francis rejoiced in the singing of his beloved birds, but he could scarcely see them. Blindness was creeping upon him. Now he could see only the sun in his heart. Even near the sky, here on Monte Alvernia, its earthly light was dimmed. When the physician cauterized his forehead, and it was not a gentle operation, he had not feared. "My little Brother Fire will be kind to me," he had said. And Brother Fire was. Francis had never permitted fire to be quenched when it was unnecessary, "for how beautiful, how purifying, this creature of God is!"

In this lonely place he lived in a little hut by himself, Brother Masseo having taken upon himself all the daily duties. There he suffered the agony of knowing that his own brothers were betraying his ideals. As his master knew that men he loved would betray him, so Francis knew that the pride and pomp of life, a

hatred of poverty, and the love of worldly prudence, were casting Lady Poverty from the hearts of many of those who professed to follow him. In truth, the religion was rent by conflicts between the lovers of the pure, old rule and the supporters of a compromise between Franciscan ideals and the ideas of the world. But his agony of heart brought him nearer to his divine model, who had suffered in the garden.

The stigmata of Christ were the impress of the wounds on his head, his side, his hands, and his feet, and ever since the vision of the living Christ had appeared to him, he had lived in contemplation of the wounds Christ endured for love. The thought of them was always with him; and to him, alone in his hut, they became more and more real as the great feast of the exaltation of the holy cross came nearer. On the morning of this feast he had watched and prayed all night. There appeared "a seraph having six wings," says Thomas of Celano, "and, sheltered by these glowing wings, was borne a most beautiful man whose hands and feet were stretched out

after the manner of a cross." . . . "And as the seraph flew very swiftly toward Francis," writes St. Bonaventure, "his heart was filled with joy and sorrow; for he rejoiced at the gracious aspect with which Christ, under the form of a seraph, looked upon him; yet to behold him thus fastened to a cross pierced his soul like a sword of compassion and grief."

The vision made him marvel. How could it be that the sorrow of the crucifixion could be coupled with such joyous and seraphical splendor? St. Bonaventure continues:

> At last he understood by the revelation of God that this vision had been presented to his eyes by divine Providence, that the friend of Christ might know that he was to be transformed into Christ crucified, not by the martyrdom of the flesh, but by the fire of the spirit. The vision, disappearing, left behind it a marvelous fire in his heart and a no less wonderful sign impressed upon his flesh. For there began to appear on his hands and feet the appearance of nails, as he had seen them in the vision of the crucified. His hands and his feet appeared pierced through with nails, the heads of the nails being seen in the insides of the hands and the upper part of the feet, and the points on the reverse side. The heads of the nails in the hands and feet were round and black, and the points somewhat long and bent, as if they had been turned back. On the right side, as

if it had been pierced by a lance, was the mark of a red wound, from which the sacred blood often flowed and stained his tunic. The servant of God, seeing the holy signs thus deeply impressed on his flesh so that he could not conceal them from his familiar companions, and yet fearing to discover the secret of the Lord, was in great trouble and perplexity whether he should declare or conceal what he had seen. He therefore called some of the brethren and in general terms proposed his doubt to them and asked their counsel. Then a certain friar, Illuminatus both by grace and by name, knowing that the holy man had seen some marvelous vision which had thus amazed him, answered: "Brother, not only for thine own sake, but for the sake of others, thou knowest that the divine mysteries are made known to thee. And therefore it seems to me that thou shouldst fear to conceal this, which thou hast received for the benefit of many, lest thou shouldst be condemned for hiding the talent committed to thy care." At these words the holy man was so greatly moved that though he was accustomed to say on these occasions, "My secret is to myself," he now related with great fear all the order of the aforesaid vision, adding that he who had appeared to him had said to him other things which he must never so long as he should live reveal to any man. And it is to be believed that these discourses were secret things spoken to him by that sacred seraph who so marvelously appeared to him on the cross, and which perhaps it was not lawful to utter to men. When the lover of Christ had been transformed by his true love into his own image, having fulfilled the forty days which he had thus spent in solitude before the

feast of the Archangel Michael, this angelic man, Francis, descended from the mount, bearing with him the image of the crucified engraven not on tables of wood or stone by the hand of the artificer, but written on his members of flesh by the finger of the living God. And because it is written that it is good "to conceal the secret of the king," therefore this man, who was conscious of so royal a secret, endeavored to conceal its sacred signs from the eyes of all men. But inasmuch as God is wont for His own glory to reveal the great things which He works, the Lord Himself, who had secretly impressed these tokens, openly manifested many miracles by their power, that the hidden and miraculous virtues of these stigmata might be clearly known by many signs.

Back to the Portiuncula he went, growing weaker and blinder, but ecstatic in knowing the secret of the King, which he had confided only to a few of his brethren. The poor were helped and the sick healed, and he went singing homeward. Now he was near Clara again, and there is a story in the Fioretti that he gave to her the consolation of eating under her roof. But at least he was near her, and she and her sisters could help him in his need as only ministering and loving women can. More and more he desired that his brethren should be utterly poor, and that they should reach the

people not by splendid buildings or by elaborate sermons, but by simple words and songs. And from the litle wood of the Portiuncula could be heard the chief poem he had composed.

O most mighty, omnipotent, and good Lord,
To Thee belong praise, honor, and all benediction!
To Thee alone, Most High, are all these due.
There is no man worthy Thy name to speak.
Praise be to Thee, my Lord, with all Thy creatures!
Especially for Messer Sun, our brother,
Who gives us light in the day;
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor.
Of Thee, Most High, he is the sign.
Praise be to Thee for Sister Moon and the Stars,
Which Thou madest for heaven, clear, rare, and beautiful!
Praise to Thee, my Lord, for Brother Wind,
For air and clouds, for quiet time and stormy,
By which Thou dost sustain all Thy creatures!
Praise to Thee, my Lord, for Sister Water,
Useful and humble, and precious and chaste!
Praise to Thee, my Lord, for Brother Fire,
Who lightens up the night,
And is handsome and joyous and robust and able!
Praise to Thee, my Lord, for our sister and mother,
The Earth, who brings forth varied fruit and herbs, bright-hued,
Who sustains and keeps us.
Praise to Thee for those who forgive for love of Thee
Sustaining afflictions and tribulations!
Blessed be those who keep themselves in peace!
By Thee, Most High, will they be crowned at last.
Praise to Thee, my Lord, for Sister Death,
From whom no man can flee!
But woe to those who die in mortal sin!
Blessed are those who do Thy most holy will!
To them the second death can bring no evil.
Praise ye, and bless my Lord, and thank Him, and serve Him with great humility!

Willing to show that human means must be used to their full extent, he went to Siena to consult a physician learned in the diseases of the eye. He moved very slowly. He tried with all his might to be joyful at the thought of leaving his brethren, but he saw too well that what men called prudence and common sense was corrupting his ideals. They found money necessary; Lady Poverty was served with only half a heart. And yet he would not interfere. "As I can not correct and amend them by preaching, admonitions, and example, I will not become their executioner, to punish them as though I were a worldly authority."

Recognizing that his kingdom was not of this world, he had resigned all temporal authority over them. Nevertheless, the prudence of the brethren he loved made him wretched. Of the future master-general of the friars he hoped that "he would hold money in detestation as the chief curse of our profession and perfection." "If I could go to the chapter, I would let them know my wishes." He could not go; but he could make peace between the bishop and the governor of Assisi,

and this he did; and to this conciliation, which meant the preventing of a disastrous war, we owe the lines in the "Canticle of the Creatures" in honor of forgiveness. The bishop, who loved him, forced him to his palace. Assisi demanded it; for might not another city, Italian or foreign, tear the dying and precious one from those to whom he belonged? He was already a saint in the heart of Italy, and more than seven cities had already their eyes on his precious body.

HIS HAPPY DYING

Francis now left all to God. He became joyous again; his Sister Death was coming. He sang when he could, but always he begged his brethren to sing of God, of the sun, of all creatures, and he loved the accompaniment of the lute. Elias found this indecorous. "People might be shocked at such a song on a death-bed and in a bishop's house," he reproved; but Francis and Leo and Angelo and the rest sang joyfully despite this. He was not for earthly palaces. He must die soon, his physician said; and then he determined to

die at the Portiuncula, saying, "Praise be to Thee for Sister Death!"

To the Portiuncula they carried him, Angelo, the knightly, whose politeness he praised; the eloquent Masseo; the mystical Brother Giles; the strong Brother John; the irrepressible but patient Brother Juniper. And they all sang:

"Praise be to Thee, my Lord, with all Thy creatures!"

And when they came to the hospice which overlooked Assisi, Francis, whose eyes were almost blind, asked his brethren to turn his face toward it and to help him stand. "Blessed be thou of God, O holy city, because by thee shall many souls be saved, and in thee many servants of God shall dwell, and from out of thee shall many be elected to the kingdom of eternal life!" "And having spoken these words," writes the author of the Fioretti, "he was carried to St. Mary of the Angels."

From the dear retreat of the Portiuncula, near the little wood, he dictated a piteous letter, as a child would to his mother, to Donna

Jocopa di Settesoli at Rome. His spiritual daughter Clara should see him again, — he sent her this message, — but not in this life. But to Donna Jocopa, the practical, the woman in the world, but not of it, he wrote:

> And believe me, if thou wouldst see me not in death, arise as soon as thou shalt get this letter and come to St. Mary of the Angels. Bring with thee a shroud for my body and the wax needed for my funeral. I pray thee also bring me some of the food thou gavest me when I was sick in Rome.

Francis then told the scribe to fold the letter up and to put it away. "There was no need to send it." While the brother wondered, there was a knocking at the door, and in came this noble lady with her two sons, Roman senators, and before the portals rode a great group of knights. But Francis cared not for all this pomp. "He was as the painted wood in the statues of the saints, not to be honored but as the symbol of the spirit." Madonna Jocopa had not waited for his letter. In a dream she had been told that her dear friend needed her. And she had brought even the little cakes made with almonds and sugar that Francis liked and longed for when near

DEATH OF ST. FRANCIS

his death. And because he loved the hooded larks, "it pleased the Lord that these holy birds should show him some sign of affection at the hour of his death; for on the evening of Saturday, after vespers, before the night in which he departed to the Lord, a great number of these birds came on the roof above his bed and flew about singing, but very softly." Francis threw off his tunic that he might die poor and naked like his Lord. Lying on the earth, with his hand covering the wound on the right side, he said: "Farewell, my children, and when any temptation and trouble come near you, say, 'Blessed are they who persevere in those things which they have begun.' And now I go to God, to whose grace I commend you all."

The sight of the failing body, clothed only in the cincture of penitents, drew floods of tears to the eyes of his brethren. One of them brought him a poor robe, as the Bishop of Assisi had done years before. "To thee, poor for the love of Christ, I bring this," he said. Francis rejoiced. He was as poor as his Lord had been.

When his time came, on October 3, 1226, in the fortieth year of age, he asked that the Gospel of St. John should be read to him — "before the feast of the Passover." The reader went on until the end. Then the dying man, as softly as the birds above the roof, sang: "I cried to the Lord with my voice; with my voice I made supplication to the Lord," finishing with: "Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy name: the just wait for me until Thou reward me." He died singing.

Then his soul passed as a bright star in a cloud, carried, as upon many waters, to heaven.

Santa Clara, doomed to live without him many years to come, saw him when they brought his body to the convent, and kissed the sacred wounds. The chroniclers do not tell us that she wept, but we know that her sisters wept. From this time she — without whom he would have faltered, — she, the co-foundress of the Franciscans, — could only wait.

And the gates of heaven opened for a time for the weary children of men.

Two years after his death, Francis, the Poor Little Man, became, through the mandate of the church, Francis the Saint. He had shown a view of higher things to Italy and the world. Men looked up with the light of the eternal sun upon their faces. He, a little child, had led them; he belonged to them all, as every poor little child, in memory of the sacred humanity, belongs to us all.

THE END

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